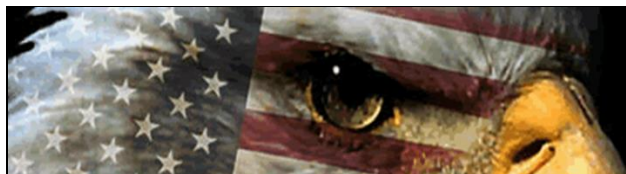



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	05/03 Putin orders retaliatory sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-signs-decree-new-retaliatory-sanctions-against-west-kremlin-2022-05-03/

GIST	<p>May 3 (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree on retaliatory economic sanctions in response to the "unfriendly actions of certain foreign states and international organisations", the Kremlin said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The document does not provide any details of which individuals or entities may be affected by the measures.</p> <p>According to the decree, Russia will forbid the export of products and raw materials to people and entities that it has sanctioned.</p> <p>The decree also prohibits transactions with foreign individuals and companies hit by Russia's retaliatory sanctions, and permits Russian counterparties not to fulfill obligations towards them.</p> <p>Under the decree, the Russian government has 10 days to compile lists of foreign individuals and companies to be sanctioned, as well as to define "additional criteria" for a number of transactions that could be subject to restrictions.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 Finland, Sweden path NATO membership
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/what-you-need-know-about-finlands-swedens-path-nato-membership-2022-05-03/
GIST	<p>HELSINKI/STOCKHOLM, May 3 (Reuters) - Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Finland and Sweden have been considering applying for membership of the NATO military alliance, which would mark a major policy shift for the Nordic region.</p> <p>Here is the latest about the process and the key points under discussion:</p> <p>WHAT ARE THE KEY STEPS AHEAD?</p> <p>The coming days are crucial. On May 12, Finland will decide to apply for NATO membership, newspaper <i>Iltalehti</i> reported on Sunday, citing anonymous Finnish government sources.</p> <p>It would come in two steps, <i>Iltalehti</i> reported. President Sauli Niinisto would first announce his approval for Finland to join, followed by parliamentary groups giving their approval for the application.</p> <p>There would be no plenary vote in parliament but parliamentary group leaders expressing their groups' decisions.</p> <p>Reuters was not immediately available to confirm the report.</p> <p>In Sweden, parliament is conducting a security policy review, including the pros and cons of joining the alliance, with the results due on May 13. There is already a majority in parliament in support of NATO membership.</p> <p>In parallel, the ruling Social Democrats, the biggest party in every election for the last 100 years, will have an internal debate on May 9-12 on whether to drop long-standing opposition to NATO membership, with the party leadership to take a decision by May 24 at the latest.</p> <p>If Finland applies, Sweden is likely to do the same, as it would not want to be the sole Nordic outsider. Other Nordic countries - Norway, Denmark and Iceland - have joined the pact as founding members. Several recent polls suggest a majority of Swedes are in favour - something never seen before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Finland and Sweden would like to have some guarantees that NATO member nations would defend them during any transition period, when they would be applicants to the alliance, but not yet in.</p>

Ratification can take a year, NATO diplomats say, as parliaments of all 30 NATO countries need to approve new members.

NATO-Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said the countries could join "quickly" and that he was sure arrangements could be found for the interim period.

The United States and Britain have promised Sweden "increased military presence, more in-depth military exercises and 'strong political' support from NATO countries" during a possible NATO application process, Swedish daily Aftonbladet reported.

Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto acknowledged filing a membership application by itself would not bring the two Nordic countries under the umbrella of NATO's Article 5, which guarantees that an attack on one ally is an attack on all.

"But at the same time NATO member countries have an interest in that no security breaches would take place during the application period," Haavisto said, adding that Finland could, for instance, hold enhanced military exercises with NATO members during that time.

Moscow has repeatedly warned of "serious consequences" if Finland and Sweden join NATO, saying it would have to strengthen its land, naval and air forces in the Baltic Sea, and raised the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons in the area.

Russia and Finland share a 1,300-km (810-mile) border; the Kola Peninsula is a "strategic bastion" Moscow considers key for Russia's national security; it is also the home of the Russian Northern Fleet; and Russia's second-biggest city, St. Petersburg, lies some 170 km from the border with Finland.

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HEADLINE	05/03 Taiwan: risk of US Stinger missile delays
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-flags-risk-stinger-missile-delays-says-pressing-us-2022-05-03/
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, May 3 (Reuters) - Taiwan's Defence Ministry on Tuesday said deliveries of shoulder-fired Stinger anti-aircraft missiles could be delayed, saying they were pressing the United States to deliver on schedule as the war in Ukraine pressures supplies.</p> <p>The missiles are in hot demand in Ukraine, where they have successfully kept Russian aircraft at bay, but U.S. supplies have shrunk and producing more of the anti-aircraft weapons faces significant hurdles.</p> <p>The United States approved the sale of 250 of Raytheon Technologies' (RTX.N) Stinger missiles to Taiwan in 2019. Taiwanese media has reported Taiwan expected to complete delivery by 2026.</p> <p>Chu Wen-wu, deputy head of Taiwan's army planning department, said those deliveries may get held up.</p> <p>"It is true that due to changes in the international situation, there may be a risk of delayed delivery this year of the portable Stinger missiles," he told a news conference. "The Army will coordinate with the full procurement plan and continue to require the U.S. military to implement it normally in accordance with the contract."</p> <p>Ministry spokesman Sun Li-fang added that procurement of General Dynamics Corp (GD.N) M1A2 Abrams tanks was "normal" - Taiwan plans to buy 108 of them with delivery by 2027.</p> <p>Taiwan's air force is also in touch with the United States to ensure that deliveries of new F-16 fighter jets take place on schedule before 2026, he said.</p> <p>This is the second time this week the ministry has warned of delayed deliveries of U.S. weapons.</p>

	<p>It said on Monday it was considering alternative weapons options after the United States informed it that the delivery of an artillery system would be delayed due to a "crowded" production line.</p> <p>Taiwan, claimed by China as its own territory, is undertaking a military modernisation programme to improve its capabilities to fend off a Chinese attack, including with precision weapons like missiles.</p> <p>U.S. officials have been pushing Taiwan to modernise its military so it can become a "porcupine", hard for China to attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 Another energy price spike: electricity
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/03/business/energy-environment/high-electric-bills-summer.html
GIST	<p>Already frustrated and angry about high gasoline prices, many Americans are being hit by rapidly rising electricity bills, compounding inflation's financial toll on people and businesses.</p> <p>The national average residential electricity rate was up 8 percent in January from a year earlier, the biggest annual increase in more than a decade. The latest figures, from February, show an almost 4 percent annual rise, reaching the highest level for that month and approaching summer rates, which are generally the most expensive.</p> <p>In Florida, Hawaii, Illinois and New York, rates are up about 15 percent, according to the Energy Department's latest figures. Combined with a seasonal increase in the use of electricity as people turn on air-conditioners, the higher rates will leave many people paying a lot more for power this summer than they did last year.</p> <p>The immediate reason for the jump in electric rates is that the war in Ukraine has driven up the already high cost of natural gas, which is burned to produce about 40 percent of America's electricity. And supply chain chaos has made routine grid maintenance and upgrades more expensive.</p> <p>What is particularly worrisome, energy experts said, is that these short-term disruptions could be just the start. They fear that electricity rates will rise at a rapid clip for years because utilities and regulators are realizing they need to harden electric grids against natural disasters linked to climate change like the winter storm that left Texas without power for days last year. Power companies are also spending more on new transmission lines, batteries, wind turbines, solar farms and other gear to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>U.S. utilities could spend hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming years to repair and upgrade grids.</p> <p>Almost all of those costs will filter down to monthly electric bills.</p> <p>"This is an affordability emergency," said Mark Toney, executive director of The Utility Reform Network, or TURN, which represents ratepayers in California, where rates in February were up 12 percent from a year earlier and utilities are asking regulators to approve further increases. "If you want to control inflation, one of the things you have to control is energy costs."</p> <p>Natural gas prices have surged in recent months as U.S. producers have sent more fuel to Europe, which wants to use less Russian gas. Utilities in a few places, like Hawaii and Puerto Rico, rely on some power plants fueled by oil, which has also become much more expensive. The price of coal, which accounts for roughly 20 percent of U.S. electricity, has gone up, too.</p> <p>The Biden administration has been urging the industry to produce more oil and natural gas, but energy experts say it could take a year or two to significantly increase supplies.</p>

Demand for electricity is also rising because of climate change. The National Weather Service expects this summer to be hotter than average in most of the country. People who can least afford higher bills could feel the pain the most because most moratoriums on power shut-offs during the pandemic have ended. Last month, the White House sought to soften the blow of higher bills by making hundreds of millions of dollars available for home energy assistance.

“Consumers are going to pay the price for this,” said Gordon van Welie, chief executive of ISO New England, the electric grid operator in the Northeast, where electric rates are among the highest in the country. “The reality is we’re going to be dependent on gas for a very long time.”

Even the cost of wind turbines and solar panels, which had been falling for years, has risen recently because of supply chain problems. But analysts said that over the next decade those renewable sources should help tamp down energy costs, reducing the toll that volatile oil, natural gas and coal prices can take on family budgets and business profits.

The problem is that building new wind and solar installations and the related power lines and batteries will have an upfront cost.

“Wind, solar and hydro are exactly what you need,” said Mark Cooper, a senior fellow for economic analysis at the Institute for Energy and the Environment at Vermont Law School. “We should have been much further along in the transition, which we haven’t been.”

Relying more on the grid

Residents of Massachusetts and other New England states have long endured some of the highest electricity rates in the country. Then in January, rates jumped again. And government forecasters say summer temperatures in the Northeast will be far above normal.

Natural gas sells for about two to three times as much as it did two or three years ago, when a glut sent prices tumbling. New England faces an additional challenge: It does not have enough pipeline capacity to import the fuel from producers like Texas or Pennsylvania.

Some cities and towns in Massachusetts are trying to rely less on gas, including by seeking to ban its use in new buildings. Local and state officials want builders, homeowners and businesses to switch to greener technologies like heat pumps, which operate on electricity, rather than a furnace powered by natural gas or oil. Massachusetts is also encouraging people to buy electric cars to reduce gasoline use.

While those technologies use less energy than furnaces and gasoline cars, they place new demands on the electricity network, forcing utilities to build more wind and solar farms and power lines, Mr. van Welie said. “You’re putting more and more of your eggs in the same basket, which is the grid,” he said.

As utilities spend more, rates will climb further. The national average residential electricity rate in the first two months of the year was nearly 14 cents per kilowatt-hour. In Massachusetts the average exceeded 25 cents in February. Hawaii topped all 50 states at more than 38 cents.

The Energy Information Administration, a federal agency, forecasts that rates a year from now will average about 15 cents a kilowatt-hour, or \$150 a month for the typical household that uses 1,000 kilowatt-hours.

Some people find that it can be hard to escape high energy bills, even when they conserve.

Thomas Popik moved to Arlington, Mass., a Boston suburb, from New Hampshire in December after buying a home that uses a heat pump. But Massachusetts’s electricity rates are so much higher than in New Hampshire, where they averaged about 22 cents per kilowatt-hour in February, that his monthly bills are about the same in a more efficient home.

Mr. Popik plans to add solar panels to further reduce his costs and environmental footprint. And if electricity rates continue to climb and service is unreliable during bad weather, he said, he may disconnect from the grid — an approach embraced by some residents of California.

“You’re going to see more and more people doing that kind of thing, especially if rates become unreasonable,” said Mr. Popik, who is the chairman and president of the Foundation for Resilient Societies, a nonprofit group that focuses on critical equipment and services like electricity, fuel, telecommunications and aviation. “Solar, battery, backup generator — under that paradigm, why should I be charged high electricity rates?”

Utility executives said they understood that growing frustration. Mr. van Welie of ISO New England said federal and state officials needed to come up with policies that lowered the cost of energy, including by using renewable energy more efficiently.

But in a highly polarized political system, there are few energy reforms that can win bipartisan support. President Biden’s signature energy and climate proposal has stalled in Congress because the measure has no Republican backing and Democrats have a narrow majority.

“It’s going to require government and regulatory direction, and that’s hard to get here in the U.S.,” Mr. van Welie said.

Renewable energy could help lower costs

Rates in the first two months of the year were lower than a year earlier in fewer than a dozen states. Most were in the Midwest and Northwest — areas that rely extensively on wind or hydroelectric power, which tend not to be affected by the swings of global commodity markets.

In Oregon, for example, electric rates fell almost 1.5 percent in January and less than 1 percent in February, though some companies like Portland General Electric did raise rates modestly. Even so, rates at that utility remain well below the national average. The utility, the largest in the state, gets about 20 percent of its electricity from hydroelectric dams, 13 percent from wind turbines and 2 percent from solar panels.

The utility has also recently installed software to improve its ability to incorporate energy from sources like rooftop solar panels and batteries on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood and business-by-business basis. This gives the company more control and flexibility.

Many electric grid operators and utilities have not invested in such tools and cannot monitor and control small energy systems to choose — the lowest-cost renewables over the course of the day, taking into account whether the sun is shining and wind is blowing.

“We have been focused on renewable energy for over a decade, leveraging technologies to allow us to integrate ever-increasing amounts of renewables at the lowest cost for customers,” Maria M. Pope, the chief executive of Portland General, said in an interview.

In much of the United States, utilities are fighting the growth of rooftop solar. Regulators in California have proposed greatly reducing incentives for residential solar systems, though the measure has stalled because of opposition from the solar industry and homeowners. In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis recently vetoed a bill backed by utilities that would have effectively gutted incentives for rooftop panels.

Still, utility executives said they were cognizant that they couldn’t just keep raising rates, especially as more people used the grid to power electric cars and heat pumps.

Overall, the greater reliance on the electric grid will reduce costs, said Richard McMahon, senior vice president energy supply and finance at the Edison Electric Institute, a utility industry group. Electric cars and heat pumps, for example, will require less maintenance, do away with fill-ups at gas pumps and reduce heating bills.

	<p>“Customers are going to need to think bigger picture: What’s my total energy costs?” Mr. McMahon said.</p> <p>The Energy Information Administration expects average electricity rates to fall to about 10.5 cents per kilowatt-hour by 2030 and roughly 10 cents by 2050 because of a greater use of renewable energy.</p> <p>“This is a race between getting to the future and being stuck in the past,” said Mr. Cooper, the senior fellow at the Vermont Law School. “The future is less expensive.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 Era of cheap, plenty ending?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/03/business/economy/pandemic-supply-chains-inflation.html
GIST	<p>For the past three decades, companies and consumers benefited from cross-border connections that kept a steady supply of electronics, clothes, toys and other goods so abundant it helped prices stay low.</p> <p>But as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine continue to weigh on trade and business ties, that period of plenty appears to be undergoing a partial reversal. Companies are rethinking where to source their products and stocking up on inventory, even if that means lower efficiency and higher costs. If it lasts, such a shift away from fine-tuned globalization could have important implications for inflation and the world’s economy.</p> <p>Economists are debating whether recent supply chain turmoil and geopolitical conflicts will result in a reversal or reconfiguration of global production, in which factories that were sent offshore move back to the United States and other countries that pose less of a political risk.</p> <p>If that happens, a decades-long decline in the prices of many goods could come to an end or even begin to go in the other direction, potentially boosting overall inflation. Since around 1995, durable goods like cars and equipment have tamped down inflation, and prices for nondurable goods like clothing and toys have often grown only slowly.</p> <p>Those trends began to change in late 2020 after the onset of the pandemic, as shipping costs soared and shortages collided with strong demand to push car, furniture and equipment prices higher. While few economists expect the past year’s breakneck price increases to continue, the question is whether the trend toward at least slightly pricier goods will last.</p> <p>The answer could hinge on whether a shift away from globalization takes hold.</p> <p>“It would certainly be a different world — it might be a world of perhaps higher inflation, perhaps lower productivity, but more resilient, more robust supply chains,” Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, said at an event last month when asked about a possible move away from globalization.</p> <p>Still, Mr. Powell said, it’s not obvious how drastically conditions will change. “It’s not clear that we’re seeing a reversal of globalization,” he said. “It’s clear that it’s slowed down.”</p> <p>The period of global integration that prevailed before the pandemic made many of the things Americans buy cheaper. Computers and other technology made factories more efficient, and they chugged out sneakers, kitchen tables and electronics at a pace unmatched in history. Companies slashed their production cost by moving factories offshore, where wages were lower. The adoption of steel shipping containers, and ever larger cargo ships, allowed products to be whisked from Bangladesh and China to Seattle and Tupelo and everywhere in between for astonishingly low prices.</p> <p>But those changes also had consequences for American factory workers, who saw many jobs disappear. The political backlash to globalization helped carry former President Donald J. Trump into office, as he promised to bring factories back to the United States. His trade wars and rising tariffs encouraged some</p>

companies to move operations out of China, although typically to other low-cost countries like Vietnam and Mexico.

The pandemic also exposed the snowball effect of highly optimized supply chains: Factory shutdowns and transportation delays made it difficult to secure some goods and parts, including semiconductors that are crucial for electronics, appliances and cars. Shipping costs have soared by a factor of 10 in just two years, erasing the cost savings of making some products overseas.

Starting late in 2020, prices for washing machines, couches and other big products jumped sharply as production limitations collided with high demand.

Inflation has only accelerated since. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further snarled supply chains, raising the prices of gas and other commodities in recent months and helping to push the Fed's closely watched inflation index up 6.6 percent over the year through March.

That is the fastest pace of inflation since 1982, and price gains are touching the highest level in decades across many advanced economies, including the eurozone and Britain.

Many economists expect price increases for durable goods to cool substantially in the months ahead, which should help calm overall price gains. Data from March suggested that they were beginning to moderate. Rising Fed interest rates could help temper buying, as borrowing to buy cars, machines or home improvement supplies becomes more expensive.

But there are still questions about whether — in light of what companies and countries have learned — major products will return to the steady price declines that were the norm before the coronavirus.

It's not clear yet to what extent factories are moving closer to home. A "reshoring index" published by Kearney, a management consulting firm, was negative in 2020 and 2021, indicating that the United States was importing more manufactured goods from low-cost countries.

But more firms reported moving their supply chains out of China to other countries, and American executives were more positive about bringing more manufacturing to the United States.

Duke Realty, which rents warehouse and industrial facilities in the United States, expects the change to be a source of demand in years to come, though the reworking may take a while. Customers are "now future-proofing their supply chains," Steve Schnur, the firm's chief operating officer, said on an earnings call last week.

"Some reshoring is occurring — let's make no mistake about that," Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the director general of the World Trade Organization, said in an interview. But the data show that most businesses are mitigating risk by building up their inventories and finding additional suppliers in low-cost countries, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala said. That process could end up integrating poorer countries in Africa and other parts of the world more deeply into global value chains, she said.

Janet L. Yellen, the Treasury secretary, said last month that supply chains had proved too vulnerable given the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, and urged a reorientation around "a large group of trusted partners," an approach she called "friendshoring."

The approach might result in some higher costs, she said, but it would be more resilient, and a large enough group would allow countries to maintain efficiencies from the global division of labor.

"Our supply chains are not secure, and they're not resilient," Ms. Yellen said, adding, "that's a threat that needs to be addressed."

Ford Motor, which has grappled with pandemic supply chain issues, is working on making its own batteries — including in America. "In the medium and long term, securing raw materials, processing,

precursor and refinement and setting up battery production here in the U.S. and around the world is a big work statement for us,” Jim Farley, the company’s chief executive, said on an earnings call last week.

Companies are also beginning to face pressure to price in the true cost of carbon emissions from shipping parts, which could prompt them to move factories closer to consumers.

Scott N. Paul, president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, said economic and political risks along with carbon-cost calculations were encouraging companies to gradually shift their manufacturing closer to the United States.

“I only see that trend accelerating,” he said.

Long-run population changes could also compound the effects of a slowdown or pullback in globalization, pushing up prices by making labor more expensive. By 2050, one in six people worldwide will be older than 65, according to United Nations estimates, up from one in 11 in 2019.

That aging means that, after decades in which a newly global pool of labor made employees cheap and easy to find, recent world-spanning labor shortages could last. That could push up wages, and companies may pass elevated labor costs along to customers by raising prices.

“Demography and the reversal of globalization mean that a great deal of it is likely to be permanent — clearly not all,” Charles Goodhart, an emeritus professor at the London School of Economics, said of pandemic-era price and labor issues. Mr. Goodhart co-wrote a book in 2020 arguing that the world was on the cusp of a demographic reversal.

“There will be structural forces raising inflation for probably the next two to three decades,” he said.

Some disagree. Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, pointed out that plenty of workers were available in parts of South Asia, Africa and Latin America. And inflation has been weak in Japan for decades, despite its much older population.

Nor would a decline in globalization necessarily add to inflation in the long run, he said. By slowing growth, it could lead to less demand and price increases.

But the intertwined trajectory for globalization, goods prices and inflation on the whole will be one that economists watch closely.

“People used to say it’s the million-dollar question, but I guess these days it’s the billion- or trillion-dollar question,” said Carlos Viana de Carvalho, a former New York Fed economist who is now head of research at the Brazilian asset management firm Kapitalo Investimentos. It’s possible, but not definite, he said, that the world is moving into a new economic era marked by higher inflation amid the changes to global integration and intensifying climate concern.

“These things are very hard to identify in real time,” he said.

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HEADLINE	05/03 Stunning breach confidentiality, secrecy
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/02/politics/roe-v-wade-supreme-court/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)In a stunning breach of Supreme Court confidentiality and secrecy, Politico has obtained what it calls a draft of a majority opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito that would strike down Roe v. Wade.</p> <p>The draft was circulated in early February, according to Politico. The final opinion has not been released and votes and language can change before opinions are formally released. The opinion in this case is not expected to be published until late June.</p>

CNN has not independently confirmed the document's authenticity. [Politico](#) says it has authenticated the draft. A Supreme Court spokesperson declined to comment to CNN.

According to the draft, the court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*'s holding of a federal constitutional right to an abortion. The opinion would be the most consequential abortion decision in decades and transform the landscape of women's reproductive health in America.

It appears that five justices would be voting to overturn *Roe*. Chief Justice [John Roberts](#) did not want to completely overturn *Roe v. Wade*, meaning he would have dissented from part of Alito's draft opinion, sources tell CNN, likely with the court's three liberals.

That would mean that the five conservative justices that would make up the majority overturning *Roe* are Alito and Justices [Clarence Thomas](#), Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett.

Roberts is willing, however, to uphold the Mississippi law that would ban abortion at 15 weeks of pregnancy, CNN has learned. Under current law, government cannot interfere with a woman's choice to terminate a pregnancy before about 23 weeks, when a fetus could live outside the womb.

A largely somber crowd [gathered outside the Supreme Court](#) building Monday evening, as people came together to console one another and question what to do next.

At one point, the crowd began to chant, "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Samuel Alito's gotta go." "We will not go back." "Abortion rights are under attack, what do we do, stand up fight back." "Pack the courts."

Politico's publishing of the draft is unprecedented by the high court's standards of secrecy. The inner deliberations among the justices while opinions are being drafted and votes are being settled are among the most closely held details in Washington.

"This news is simply stunning for the Supreme Court as an institution," said Steve Vladeck, CNN Supreme Court analyst and professor at the University of Texas School of Law. "Not only is the result it portends -- the overruling of *Roe* and *Casey* -- a shockwave to our constitutional politics, but we have never seen a leak remotely like this from inside the Court, where we're not just hearing what the result is going to be, but we're seeing the draft majority opinion in advance. It's hard to believe that the former doesn't help to explain the latter, but it's an earthquake in both respects."

The case in question is *Dobbs v. Jackson*. It concerns a challenge to Mississippi's 15-week ban on abortion and oral arguments were heard on December 1. The release of a final opinion in the case is expected later this Spring or early summer.

In the draft opinion, Alito writes that *Roe* "must be overruled."

"The Constitution makes no reference to abortion and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision," Alito wrote. He said that *Roe* was "egregiously wrong from the start" and that its reasoning was "exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences."

He added, "It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's representatives."

"That is what the Constitution and the rule of law demand," he said, according to the draft.

Already nearly half of the states have or will pass laws that ban abortion, while others have enacted strict measures regulating the procedure.

Process of voting

Oral arguments in the case were held on December 1.

Under normal procedure, by the end of that week the justices would have met in their private conference to take a preliminary vote on the issue. They would have gone around the table in order of seniority discussing their take on the case. Roberts would have gone first, with Barrett last.

After that initial tally, if Roberts was in the majority he would assign the majority opinion. Otherwise the most senior justice would have taken that responsibility. After that, draft opinions would go between chambers. In the past, justices have changed their votes and sometimes a majority opinion ultimately becomes a dissent.

A reversal of Roe would leave abortion policy up to individual states and would likely produce a patchwork system where the procedure would remain largely available in Democratic-led states, while Republican-led states would pass extreme limits or outright bans on it.

The Dobbs case was perhaps the most anticipated case of the court's term, and most court observers expected that the conservative majority was likely to scale back or outright overturn Roe's holding. At oral arguments, Roberts was the only one of the six Republican appointees who signaled interest in exploring a narrower opinion that would have upheld Mississippi's law but preserved some protections for abortion rights.

Because it is one of the court's most high-stakes and contentious decisions, the anticipation was that the opinion would be among the final ones the court released at the end of its term in late June.

Roe is the law of the land until the court formally issues its opinion.

"Let's be clear: This is a draft opinion. It's outrageous, it's unprecedented, but it's not final. Abortion is your right -- and it is STILL LEGAL," Planned Parenthood said in a [tweet](#) following Politico's reporting.

Decades-long project of conservative legal moment

Overturning Roe would be the culmination of a decades-long project of the conservative legal moment.

Former President Donald Trump, when running for the White House in 2016, promised to appoint Supreme Court justices who would overturn Roe "automatically." His nominee Kavanaugh replaced Justice Anthony Kennedy, who sided with the liberal justices in past abortion rights cases. Barrett replaced the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a Democratic appointee and abortion rights champion who died weeks before the 2020 election.

Celebrated by supporters of abortion right and long reviled by critics, Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973 establishing a constitutional right to abortion before fetal viability, which most experts say occurs now at around 23-24 weeks of pregnancy. The decision was reaffirmed in 1992, in Planned Parenthood v. Casey.

A majority of the court in that case replaced Roe's framework with a new standard to determine the validity of laws restricting abortions. The court said that a regulation cannot place an "undue burden" on the right to abortion, which is defined as a "substantial obstacle in the path of a woman seeking an abortion before the fetus attains viability."

According to a CNN Poll conducted by SSRS in January, most Americans oppose overturning Roe, with a majority saying that if the decision was vacated, they'd want to see their own state move toward more permissive abortion laws.

Just 30% of Americans say they'd like to see the Supreme Court completely overturn its Roe vs. Wade decision, with 69% opposed -- a finding that's largely consistent both with other recent polling and with historical trends.

Stare decisis and overturning precedent

In the opinion, Alito also addresses the fact that Roe has been on the books for some 50 years. Although the court is loath to overturn precedent, Alito says it must do so. He said that the notion of "stare decisis" does not "compel unending adherence to Roe's abuse of judicial authority."

He said that instead of "bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue" Roe and a follow-on decision "have enflamed debate and deepened division."

"The inescapable conclusion," Alito wrote, according to the draft, "is that a right to an abortion is not deeply rooted in the Nation's history and traditions."

He also said the decision was on a "collision course" with the Constitution "from the day it was decided."

Alito also pushed back on the notion that if the court were to overturn Roe it could lead the court to overturn other cases like *Obergefell v. Hodges*, that upheld the right to same-sex marriage. He said that what "sharply distinguishes" Roe from other cases is that "abortion destroys" potential life.

The court, Alito added, was not able to end the debate on abortion nearly a half century ago when Roe came down, so it should leave the issue to states.

"This court cannot bring about the permanent resolution of a rancorous national controversy simply by dictating a settlement and telling the people to move on," he wrote.

If Roe were overturned or fundamentally weakened, 21 states have laws or constitutional amendments already in place that would make them certain to attempt to ban abortion as quickly as possible, according to the Guttmacher Institute, which favors abortion rights.

An additional five states are likely to ban abortion as soon as possible without federal protections. As of April 2022, 536 abortion restrictions have been introduced in 42 states.

Democrats outraged, call to end filibuster

The White House is expected to weigh in on the draft opinion at some point Tuesday morning, likely in a paper statement, CNN has learned.

Several Senate Democratic candidates immediately [called for the elimination of the filibuster](#) and passing legislation to protect abortion rights.

"Democrats need to act NOW—end the filibuster, codify Roe, and defend reproductive freedom," tweeted Wisconsin state Treasurer [Sarah Godlewski](#), who's running for her party's nomination for Senate. "This fight is too urgent."

"Control of the Senate has never been more important: it's time to end the filibuster, pass the Women's Health Protection Act, and fight like hell to make sure all Ohio families are free to make these critical decisions without interference from politicians in Columbus or Washington," added Ohio Rep. Tim Ryan, who's favored to win his Democratic primary on Tuesday.

The push from the Democratic candidates and others is likely to fail, unless some incumbent senators change their minds. In the 50-50 Senate, Democrats need every vote to eliminate the chamber's rules requiring 60 votes to advance most legislation. And Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona have repeatedly committed to protecting the filibuster, which sets up a 60-vote threshold that requires bipartisan cooperation to pass most legislation.

In February, Manchin also joined Senate Republicans in blocking the House-passed Women's Health Protection Act that aimed to preserve access to abortion.

	<p>In a statement, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said overturning Roe would be "the greatest restriction of rights in the past fifty years -- not just on women but on all Americans."</p> <p>"Several of these conservative Justices, who are in no way accountable to the American people, have lied to the U.S. Senate, ripped up the Constitution and defiled both precedent and the Supreme Court's reputation," the leaders said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 Fiji: US can seize Russia superyacht
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/fiji-court-rules-united-states-can-seize-russian-superyacht-reports-2022-05-03/
GIST	<p>SYDNEY, May 3 (Reuters) - A Fiji court ruled on Tuesday that the United States can seize a Russian-owned superyacht, 21 days after it arrived and was impounded by police, as the United States and its allies press Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>U.S. authorities assert that the luxury vessel, the Amadea, is ultimately owned by Russian oligarch Suleiman Kerimov, who has been sanctioned by the United States and the European Union.</p> <p>The U.S. Justice Department's Taskforce KleptoCapture has focused on seizing yachts and other luxury assets to put the finances of Russian oligarchs under strain in a bid to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin over the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Fiji's High Court granted the order to seize the Amadea, Fiji's Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions said in a statement.</p> <p>The order was made after the DPP applied to register a U.S. warrant to seize the yacht, it said.</p> <p>The vessel's lawyers, the Haniff Tuitoga law firm, did not respond to a Reuters request for comment but media reported that lawyers for the Amadea said they would seek an interim stay to stop the vessel being towed away.</p> <p>The Amadea arrived in Fiji last month after an 18-day voyage across the Pacific from Mexico. read more</p> <p>It was detained by Fiji police and its captain questioned on why it had arrived in Fiji waters without customs clearance.</p> <p>Fiji's High Court last month granted a restraining order stopping the Amadea from leaving Fiji until the court had considered the U.S. seizure warrant.</p> <p>Fiji authorities said they are acting on the U.S. request under Fiji's Mutual Assistance Criminal Matters Act.</p> <p>Lawyers for the 350-foot motor yacht's registered owner, Millemarin Investments, have denied it is ultimately owned by Kerimov.</p> <p>They told the court it was owned by another Russian oligarch, Eduard Khudainatov, the former president of oil giant Rosneft, who has not been sanctioned, media reported.</p> <p>Fiji authorities had argued that the court did not need to determine ownership of the vessel, only that it was subject to a U.S. warrant in a money-laundering case.</p> <p>The United States sanctioned Kerimov, a former Russian politician who made his fortune in gold, in 2018 and 2014 in response to Russia's actions in Syria and Ukraine.</p> <p>The U.S. embassy in Suva did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the court ruling.</p>

	<p>In a separate Taskforce KleptoCapture case linked to the Pacific, the 255-foot superyacht Tango, alleged to belong to Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg, was impounded by Spanish police on behalf of U.S. authorities in April.</p> <p>Tango is flagged in the Pacific island nation of the Cook Islands, which said it assisted in the investigation.</p> <p>A spokesman for the Cook Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration told Reuters the Cook Islands provided information that allowed investigators to connect the ship with its owner.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 Russia unleashes rockets in Mariupol
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-offensive-devastates-towns-eastern-ukraine-eu-prepares-oil-sanctions-2022-05-03/
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine, May 3 (Reuters) - Russian forces fired rockets at an encircled steel works in Ukraine's southern port city of Mariupol and thick smoke blackened the sky at the plant where officials on Tuesday said 200 civilians were trapped despite evacuations.</p> <p>Russia's offensive to capture the east and south after failing to take the capital of Kyiv has been met with commitments by Western powers to supply heavier weapons to Ukraine. On Tuesday, the European Commission is expected to finalise a ban on buying Russian oil in an effort to squeeze Moscow's war chest.</p> <p>The U.S. Congress is considering a \$33 billion military aid package, and the United Kingdom this week vowed an additional \$375 million in defence assistance.</p> <p>Reuters images showed volleys of rockets fired from a Russian truck-mounted launcher towards the sprawling Soviet-era steel complex from the outskirts of Russian-occupied Mariupol on Monday.</p> <p>The attack followed a UN-brokered ceasefire around the complex that allowed several groups of civilians to escape Mariupol's last holdout of Ukrainian fighters in recent days. It was not immediately clear if new fighting was preventing more evacuations.</p> <p>Mariupol mayor Vadym Boychenko said he hoped a first column of evacuees would reach the Ukrainian-controlled city of Zaporizhzhia on Tuesday, adding that more civilians were trapped in bunkers and tunnels under the complex and some 100,000 remained in the rest of the city.</p> <p>"You wake up in the morning and you cry. You cry in the evening. I don't know where to go at all," said Mariupol resident Tatyana Bushlanova, sitting by a blackened apartment block and talking over the sound of shells exploding nearby.</p> <p>Mariupol is a major target for Russia as it seeks to cut Ukraine off from the Black Sea and connect Russian-controlled territory in the south and east.</p> <p>Russian bombardments since troops invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 have flattened cities, killed thousands of civilians and forced more than five million to flee the country.</p> <p>The war launched by Russian President Vladimir Putin has shifted to the eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, parts of which were already held by Russian-backed separatists.</p> <p>Russia's troops are trying to encircle a large Ukrainian force there, attacking from three directions with massive bombardment along the front. Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation" to disarm Ukraine and protect it from fascists.</p>

Ukraine and the West say the fascist allegation is baseless and that the war is an unprovoked act of aggression.

Western allies of Ukraine have stepped up supplies of increasingly heavy weapons. Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska asked the West to maintain its support.

"We ask you not to stop, to accelerate the pace of heavy weapons provision," she told British television, adding that she had not seen President Volodymyr Zelenskiy since the start of the invasion.

Pope Francis said in an interview published on Tuesday that he had asked for a meeting in Moscow with Putin to try to stop the war but had not received a response. read more French President Emmanuel Macron will speak with Putin on Tuesday, Macron's office said.

In Brussels, the European Commission is expected to finalise a proposed sixth package of EU sanctions against Russia on Tuesday, including a possible embargo on buying Russian oil. In a major shift, Germany said it was prepared to back an immediate oil embargo.

Kyiv says Russia's energy exports to Europe, so far largely exempt from international sanctions, are funding the Kremlin war effort.

"This package should include clear steps to block Russia's revenues from energy resources," Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address.

EU countries have paid more than 47 billion euros (\$47.43 billion) to Russia for gas and oil since it invaded Ukraine, according to research organisation the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Ambassadors from EU countries will discuss the proposed sanctions when they meet on Wednesday. Putin responded with retaliatory economic sanctions against "unfriendly" foreign states on Tuesday.

The pope told the newspaper that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban had told him Russia planned to end the war on May 9, which Russia celebrates as "Victory Day", marking Nazi Germany's surrender in 1945.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said earlier this week that Moscow would not rush to meet that symbolic date.

Ukraine's second biggest city, Kharkiv, was under bombardment, as it has been since the early days of the invasion, the Ukrainian military said on Tuesday.

Giving an update on the battle front, Ukraine's general staff said its forces were defending the approach to Kharkiv from Izyum, a town on the Donets river, some 120 km (75 miles) to the southeast, as the enemy left a trail of destruction in Luhansk province.

Some other areas of Donetsk were under constant fire and regional authorities were trying to evacuate civilians from frontline areas, the Ukrainian president's office said.

Russian shelling killed at least three civilians in the town of Vuhledar, the president's office said. Ukraine's military said Russian forces were trying to take the frontline town of Rubizhne.

Reuters could not independently verify Ukraine's battlefield accounts.

Heavy clashes were taking place around Popasna, in Luhansk. Shelling was so intense it was not possible to collect bodies, said regional Governor Serhiy Gaidai.

	"I don't even want to speak about what's happening with the people living in Popasna, Rubizhne and Novotoshkivske right now. These cities simply don't exist anymore. They have completely destroyed them."
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HEADLINE	05/03 China heeds warnings over Russia?
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us-relieved-china-appears-heed-warnings-russia-2022-05-03/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, May 3 (Reuters) - Two months after warning that Beijing appeared poised to help Russia in its fight against Ukraine, senior U.S. officials say they have not detected overt Chinese military and economic support, a welcome development in the tense U.S.-China relationship.</p> <p>U.S. officials told Reuters in recent days they remain wary about China's long-standing support for Russia in general, but that the military and economic support that they worried about has not come to pass, at least for now. The relief comes at a pivotal time.</p> <p>President Joe Biden is preparing for a trip to Asia later this month dominated by how to deal with the rise of China and his administration is soon to release his first national security strategy about the emergence of China as a great power.</p> <p>As well as steering clear of directly backing Russia's war effort, China has avoided entering new contracts between its state oil refiners and Russia, despite steep discounts. read more In March its state-run Sinopec Group suspended talks about a major petrochemical investment and a gas marketing venture in Russia.</p> <p>Last month, the U.S. envoy to the United Nations hailed China's abstentions on U.N. votes to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a "win," underscoring how Beijing's enforced balancing act between Russia and the West may be the best outcome for Washington.</p> <p>Still, China has refused to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine and has criticized the sweeping Western sanctions on Moscow, while saying it is not deliberately helping circumvent them.</p> <p>Trade volume between Russia and China also jumped in the first quarter, and the two declared a "no limits" partnership in February.</p> <p>On Monday, Beijing's Washington embassy issued a 30-page newsletter accusing the United States of spreading "falsehoods" to discredit China over Ukraine, including through a March press leak saying Russia had sought Chinese military help. The embassy noted that U.S. officials had since said they had seen no evidence of China providing such support.</p> <p>Biden himself has not spoken of China helping Russia since telling reporters in Brussels March 24 that in a phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping, he "made sure he understood the consequences."</p> <p>Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week China is dealing with the "significant reputational risk" of being Russia's ally and that "for now we're not seeing significant support from China for Russia's military actions."</p> <p>Biden is to visit Tokyo and Seoul in what will be his first trip to Asia as president - one that won't include a stop in China. He'll meet with Indian and Australian leaders too, during a 'Quad' meeting in Tokyo.</p> <p>China has made Russia a key part of its foreign policy strategy to counter the West. Biden aides were worried Xi was planning to provide direct support to Russian President Vladimir Putin as his campaign in Ukraine faced fierce setbacks, one U.S. official said.</p> <p>They were heartened this has not happened so far, but Washington and its allies are continuing to closely monitor the level of assistance, the official said.</p>

	<p>Bonnie Glaser, an Asia expert at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, said stark warnings by the U.S. and European Union have paid off so far.</p> <p>"There has been consistent messaging that if China does so it will face severe consequences. It appears that so far, the Chinese have not. It is feasible that the Chinese planned to provide military assistance and changed their minds," she said.</p> <p>However U.S. officials remain concerned about China's refusal to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine and what they say is its continued parroting of Russian disinformation over its intervention there.</p> <p>Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said on April 21 that Beijing had "repeatedly drawn false equivalencies between Russia's war of aggression and Ukraine's self-defensive actions."</p> <p>She added: "Let's be clear, China's already doing things that do not help this situation."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Hamas claims deadly settlement attack
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/hamas-claims-deadly-attack-killed-israeli-guard-84448102
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM -- The Palestinian militant group Hamas claimed responsibility Monday for a deadly shooting that left an Israeli security guard dead at the entrance of a Jewish settlement in the West Bank last week.</p> <p>It was the first time Hamas has claimed such an attack targeting Israelis in the occupied West Bank since 2018. Friday evening's attack was the latest in a long string of incidents in recent weeks. Tensions have mounted after deadly attacks on Israelis by Palestinian assailants, an Israeli military crackdown in the West Bank, and clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police at a flashpoint Jerusalem holy site.</p> <p>The site contains the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest place in Islam. It is also the holiest site for Jews, who call it the Temple Mount because it is the location of the biblical Temples destroyed in antiquity. The site is a frequent flashpoint for tensions, and violence there last year helped spark an 11-day war between Israel and Gaza militants.</p> <p>"This is an episode in a series of responses by Al-Qassam Brigades to the aggression on Al-Aqsa Mosque," Hamas's armed wing said in a short statement.</p> <p>The claim of responsibility came a day after the Israeli army spokesperson told Kann public radio that two Palestinian suspects apprehended by the military did not belong to any militant group.</p> <p>Israel said Saturday that it had arrested two Palestinians suspected of carrying out the shooting that killed 23-year-old Vyacheslav Golev.</p> <p>On Sunday, Hamas's leader in the Gaza Strip called for more attacks against Israelis in the West Bank, saying the "real battle arena is there." In a speech, Yehiyeh Sinwar saluted the attackers who killed the guard.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Largest US wildfire grows in NM
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/largest-u-s-wildfire-grows-in-new-mexico-prompting-more-evacuations-11651522051?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>More New Mexico residents were ordered to evacuate their homes Monday as gusting winds whipped the country's biggest wildfire closer to communities in the northeast part of the state.</p> <p>The Calf Canyon fire that started April 19 has burned over 103,000 acres of bone-dry land and is expected to grow, New Mexico fire officials said.</p>

Fire authorities [expanded their calls for evacuation](#) for the small town of Mora and on Monday told residents in and around Las Vegas, N.M., to get ready. More than 1,000 firefighters are working to contain the flames east of Santa Fe.

A wind shift early in the day put the Calf Canyon wildfire on a potential collision course with Las Vegas, population 13,000, said Mike De Fries, fire information officer for the multiagency team assigned to the blaze.

“It’s very close to Las Vegas. It’s within a couple of miles,” he said.

Heavy smoke and falling ash and embers reduced visibility, creating an additional hazard for civilians and fire crews, Mr. De Fries said.

Operations Section Chief Rocky Gilbert said firefighters were cutting heavy dirt paths at strategic points to try to keep the blaze from advancing. Hotshot crews, teams of specially trained firefighters who target the heaviest parts of wildfires, were deployed in multiple places to knock down flames, he said.

“The wind can be our worst enemy and it switches a lot. But we’re holding our own,” he said.

Monday had sustained winds of up to 27 miles an hour for part of the day, with gusts reaching 45 mph, according to Gary Zell, an incident meteorologist. He forecast winds and humidity in the single digits or lower teens for the next few days and possibly into the weekend.

Despite the gusts, firefighters were able to get some helicopters into the sky to assist crews below, said Mr. De Fries.

New Mexico’s already parched landscape has been even drier than usual in recent days, according to meteorologists from the National Weather Service.

Forecasters have issued warnings of fire danger across the state, as extremely low humidity levels across much of New Mexico turned its mountainsides and forests into tinderboxes.

New Mexico firefighters are battling several other large wildfires around the state, including the Cerro Pelado blaze, not far from Los Alamos National Laboratory. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, a Democrat, signed emergency declarations for several counties in late April, to help free up resources.

The Calf Canyon fire, which recently combined with the Hermit’s Peak fire, has destroyed 172 homes and damaged or destroyed 116 other structures, according to Mr. De Fries. As of Sunday, 6,000 people had evacuated, he said.

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HEADLINE	05/02 US diplomats back to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjbqgm/us-ukraine-diplomats
GIST	<p>As the war in Ukraine’s east becomes the focus of Russian forces, the U.S. State Department has announced it’s redeploying diplomats in-country. The move comes as the Biden administration announced an additional \$33 billion in U.S. weapons and aid, contingent on congressional approval, as Washington signals it’s in it for the long haul as a key ally to Ukraine.</p> <p>Early Monday, Kristina Kvien, the chargé d’affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, made the trip to the western city of Lviv and spoke at a press conference in the city center with the mayor.</p> <p>“I can’t tell you how delighted I am to be back in Ukraine,” Kvien told a large crowd of locals. “[Russian President] Putin made a historic miscalculation in his unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine.”</p>

In mid-February, U.S. President Joe Biden announced the removal of all diplomatic personnel in Ukraine as the Russian military amassed thousands of troops along its neighboring borders before it launched the brutal invasion.

Over the weekend Secretary of State Antony Blinken [promised](#) that American diplomats not only would return to Lviv but planned to be in the capital Kyiv—a city that not a month ago was under heavy Russian aerial and artillery bombardment—by the end of May. Several other governments have resumed embassy activities in Kyiv, the U.K. being the first to do so, in April. Last week, both Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, where Austin declared the U.S. wanted to “weaken” Russia militarily as it carried on in its war in Ukraine.

There were questions whether U.S. troops would accompany State officials into Ukraine, a typical move as they act as protective guards for diplomats. The Pentagon wouldn’t clarify whether that was happening but explained to VICE News that it wasn’t out of the ordinary.

“When U.S. military members, specifically Marine Corps security guards, protect U.S. diplomatic missions, they fall under the operational control of the State Department, specifically, their Diplomatic Security Service,” a spokesperson said before referring the matter to the State Department.

State has yet to respond to whether Marines were accompanying Kvien and other diplomats into Ukraine or if there were plans to.

Of course, any U.S. soldiers in Ukraine, whether in a protective capacity or otherwise, face the risk of contact with Russian forces, or coming under fire in a munitions attack. On the same day that UN Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) visited Kyiv, Russian shells rained down on targets in the city.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Subvariants BA.4, BA.5 evade protection
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/05/omicron-subvariants-ba-4-ba-5-evade-protection-from-earlier-omicron-infection/
GIST	<p>Enduring an initial omicron infection may not spare you from omicron's subvariants, according to preliminary data from South Africa.</p> <p>The country is currently at the start of a new wave of infections, primarily driven by two omicron coronavirus subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5. Despite a towering wave of cases from the initial BA.1 omicron variant in December that infected a large chunk of the country, new omicron cases increased 259 percent in the last two weeks, according to data tracking by The New York Times. Hospitalizations are also up, and deaths have increased by 18 percent.</p> <p>Preliminary data posted online last week helps explain why cases are once again surging—the BA.4 and BA.5 omicron subvariants can evade neutralizing antibodies generated by infections from BA.1. For the study, led by virologist Alex Sigal of the Africa Health Research Institute, researchers pitted neutralization antibodies from people infected with BA.1 up against BA.4 and BA.5 in a lab. They had samples from 24 unvaccinated people infected with BA.1 and 15 vaccinated people who had also had a BA.1 infection (eight people were vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, and seven had the Johnson & Johnson vaccine).</p> <p>For the unvaccinated people, neutralizing antibody levels were 7.6-fold and 7.5-fold lower against BA.4 and BA.5, respectively, compared with levels against BA.1. In vaccinated people, the drop was shorter: 3.6-fold and 2.6-fold lower against BA.4 and BA.5, respectively.</p> <p>Ever-evolving</p> <p>Though the study is small and the data is preliminary, the findings suggest that the latest omicron subvariants can thwart protection generated from earlier omicron versions. Vaccination appears to dull the</p>

	<p>subvariants' edge, however. Overall neutralization levels against BA.4 and BA.5 were five-fold higher in vaccinated people compared to those who were unvaccinated.</p> <p>Still, in places where vaccine coverage is low or vaccine protections are waning, BA.4 and BA.5 may have the ability to generate a new wave of cases, as appears to be the current situation in South Africa.</p> <p>In the US, where vaccination coverage is relatively high, but protection may be waning, BA.4 and BA.5 have only been found circulating at low levels so far. For now, a different subvariant, BA.2, is currently dominating and causing an uptick in cases. BA.2 is similar to BA.4 and BA.5—BA.2 differs from BA.4 and BA.5 by only three mutations and one deletion in the virus' critical spike protein.</p> <p>But, US experts are most closely watching yet another subvariant, BA.2.12.1, which has a similar mutation profile as BA.2, but has two additional mutations. One of the mutations in BA.2.12.1 is in the same spot as a unique mutation in BA.4 and BA.5—amino acid position 452.</p> <p>While BA.2 is still the dominant variant in the US, BA.2.12.1 is quickly gaining ground. Currently, BA.2 accounts for an estimated 68 percent of SARS-CoV-2 cases in the US, and BA.2.12.1 accounts for an estimated 29 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Incentive for police officers western WA?
SOURCE	https://www.kuow.org/stories/what-s-the-incentive-for-police-officers-in-western-washington-today-so-far
GIST	<p>Our western Washington region is experiencing some a law enforcement switch ups as cities compete for new officers and discuss how to recruit them. At the center of this issue is Seattle, where a debate has been brewing over whether to offer hiring incentives. Meanwhile, neighboring cities like Kent and Everett are scooping up new recruits.</p> <p>Recruits like Krishan Kumar who wanted to work in Kent, because his family lives locally.</p> <p>“I wanted to work in a city that I have personal ties to, and I wanted to work in a city that was super culturally diverse because that’s what I grew up around,” he told KUOW.</p> <p>As KUOW's Amy Radil reports, Auburn, Seattle, Kennewick, and Kent have some of the highest law enforcement salaries in the state. But not all have bright and shiny signing bonuses to attract new officers. Sergeant Eric Tung leads Kent's recruiting efforts and notes that officers often consider a range of factors when deciding where to work.</p> <p>“We find that most people don’t want to become a police officer for the pay,” Tung said. “They don’t pursue policing for the paycheck. It’s more about purpose and impact.”</p> <p>Still, a signing bonus can be a nice cherry on top of a career cake. That's a big part of an ongoing discussion in Seattle these days, which also includes what kind of police officers the city wants to hire.</p> <p>Interim Chief Adrian Diaz has often spoken about the city's shortage of officers and the need to hire more, fast. Current officers are stretched thin and are using a lot of overtime to get the job done. Mayor Bruce Harrell has echoed that sentiment.</p> <p>"I tell you I need more officers, but a new kind of officer, the right kind of officers with the right kind of sensitivity," Harrell recently said. "That's a new kind of conversation because I know what the defund movement was all about. I listened. I researched. And I know what we say in this city, and other cities, why people will get caught up in that narrative. But I must tell you that I believe that all communities have to be safe first."</p> <p>The Seattle City Council previously budgeted to hire 125 more officers. More recently, Councilmember Sara Nelson has crafted a resolution as part of that effort. Resolutions, of course, are ways politicians say</p>

"Wouldn't it be nice if..." But they don't hold much authority. They do, however, have the ability to set a tone on the dais, which is what I figure Nelson is attempting to do with this resolution. Nelson is also drafting some legislation on this issue. Councilmember Lisa Herbold says she's open to incentives, but nothing that goes as far as fancy signing bonuses. These options will likely come up on the council dais this month.

On the other side of this discussion are community groups like Choose 180 and Community Passageways. They are putting forth an argument that SPD's excess funds, and funds that could go toward incentives, would be better used for prevention and policing alternatives.

There's more to this story, which Amy Radil has [here](#).

It should probably also be noted that King County [is in the middle of its own hiring process for a new sheriff](#). So there will eventually be a new sheriff in town, too.

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HEADLINE	05/02 May Day 2022 in Seattle: zero arrests
SOURCE	https://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2022/05/may-day-2022-in-seattle-workers-rights-signs-and-marches-zero-arrests/
GIST	<p>With most pandemic era restrictions lifted and turnout buoyed by recent labor victories in the city, hundreds marched from the Central District Sunday to mark May Day 2022 in Seattle.</p> <p>The annual event organized by civil rights group El Comite grew closer to past proportions after COVID-19 concerns reduced attendance at the 2021 rally and march for workers rights.</p> <p>2021 also saw arrests during May Day protests away from the workers march including on Capitol Hill where a “black bloc” group marched on Broadway and became embroiled with law enforcement after a large contingent of police responded and moved on the crowd outside the E Olive Way Starbucks following reports of property damage.</p> <p>While 2022’s march was larger, the protests and clashes with police that have brewed on May 1st in Seattle’s past did not materialize. There were reports of minor squabbles and assaults along the route involving small groups mixed with protesters, media, and bystanders attracted by the crowds but Seattle Police tells CHS there were “zero arrests” related to its First Amendment safety and traffic work at the rally and along the march route to downtown.</p> <p>A large showing of police and Seattle Fire medics called to Capitol Hill later in the day outside the boarded-up Starbucks Roastery was unrelated to any protests and involved a television news cameraperson who reportedly collapsed and was taken to the hospital after working in the area.</p> <p>Sunday, Starbucks once again covered the windows of its \$30 million plus roastery with plywood, one of the few structures on Capitol Hill to get the treatment this year.</p> <p>The roastery was the focus of another labor march last weekend after it became the second Starbucks shop in the company’s home city — and second on Capitol Hill — to unionize. Organizers of the labor effort targeting Starbucks here and across the country including District 3 Councilmember Kshama Sawant said they plan to expand the fight for a dual push for unionization at both Starbucks and Amazon at a rally and march starting at Cal Anderson last weekend. The groups have said they plan to organize a National Day of Action for Starbucks and Amazon workers later this year.</p> <p>Workers march organizers at El Comite, meanwhile, continued their call for union support, but also support for all workers and immigrants as Seattle’s May Day march returned to closer to full strength with a few hundred marching from the Central District’s Judkins Park, a new start point away from the uncertain future surrounding the neighborhood’s St. Mary’s parish. Many participants carried signs and wore shirts displaying their union and community group affiliations. Some brought their families and</p>

	friends along for the march. There were others promoting adjacent causes. And others, still, having their own say about their own May Day issues.
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HEADLINE	05/02 Britain: 25% Russia units combat ineffective
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/2/more-25-russian-units-sent-ukraine-are-combat-inef/
GIST	<p>Russia has committed about 65 percent of its entire ground combat strength to the invasion of Ukraine, but a vigorous defense and a growing cache of firepower mostly provided by NATO members have blunted the advance, according to an analysis released Monday by the British Ministry of Defense.</p> <p>At the start of the conflict in February, Moscow committed more than 120 battalion tactical groups to the fight. More than a quarter of the units have been rendered “combat ineffective” since the first Russian tanks rolled across the border, the analysis said. The staggering losses may suggest a rationale for Moscow’s decision to dial back its initial goal of totally subjecting the country in favor of consolidating its remaining troops in the disputed Donbas region.</p> <p>Some of Russia’s most elite military units, such as the VDV Airborne Forces, have suffered the highest levels of attrition in the fighting, the analysis said.</p> <p>“It will probably take years for Russia to reconstitute these forces,” British defense intelligence officials said in a Twitter post.</p> <p>Pentagon officials believe the Kremlin has yet to address the foundational problems with the invasion of Ukraine, including poor leadership at the highest levels, mismanaged logistics and even basic combat tactics.</p> <p>“Those problems did not just exist inside Ukraine, they existed outside Ukraine and still do exist,” a senior Pentagon official said Friday.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 US: ‘minimal’ Russian progress in assault
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/2/pentagon-sees-minimal-progress-russians-renewed-as/
GIST	<p>A senior Pentagon official described Russia’s progress at consolidating its forces in the Donbas as “minimal at best,” amid fresh reports that a renewed offensive in Ukraine’s south and east is failing to produce quick results.</p> <p>U.S. and NATO officials are watching closely as Russian forces prepare for what could be the decisive campaign of the invasion, after an earlier attempt to seize Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities failed badly.</p> <p>“They’ll move in and declare victory, then withdraw their troops only to let the Ukrainians take it back,” the Defense Department official told reporters at the Pentagon. “There’s a lot of back and forth [with] minimal progress at best.”</p> <p>Low morale is on the rise among a number of the Russian soldiers who have taken part in what they believed would be a quick military campaign, only to see it drag on for months with no clear end in sight, officials said.</p> <p>“They are still suffering from poor command and control [and] less than ideal logistics,” the Defense Department official said. “They still have not solved all their logistics problems.”</p> <p>While Russian troops are conducting some offensive operations in Ukraine, U.S. officials described their pace as “anemic,” saying they seem to be risk-averse, both in the air and on the ground.</p>

	<p>“That’s not just because of Russian planning or logistics,” the Defense Department official said. “A lot of it is because the Ukrainians have been resisting quite well.”</p> <p>At least 70 of the 155 mm U.S. towed M-777 howitzers that had been destined for Europe are now in the hands of Ukrainian troops. Meanwhile, Mariupol, a key port city on the Sea of Azov, continues to be subjected to ruthless bombings but has yet to be cleared of Ukrainian forces.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Russia quitting International Space Station
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/2/russia-quitting-international-space-station-over-s/
GIST	<p>Russia will end its participation in the International Space Station over objections to Western sanctions against the country for its war against Ukraine.</p> <p>Dmitry Rogozin, the general director of Russia’s space agency Roscosmos, criticized the economic penalties in an interview on state TV over the weekend, Bloomberg reported.</p> <p>“The decision has been taken already, we’re not obliged to talk about it publicly,” Mr. Rogozin said. “I can say this only — in accordance with our obligations, we’ll inform our partners about the end of our work on the ISS with a year’s notice.”</p> <p>The move was expected after Mr. Rogozin previously threatened to end cooperation with NASA and the European Space Agency over economic sanctions from the U.S. and Europe against Moscow that have crippled Russia’s economy.</p> <p>The ISS is currently home to six Americans, one Italian, one German and three Russians, according to Bloomberg.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 Europe prepares fresh Russia sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/03/europe-prepares-fresh-russia-sanctions-as-us-warns-moscow-plans-to-annex-parts-of-east-ukraine
GIST	<p>The European Union was preparing sanctions on Russian oil sales over its invasion of Ukraine after a major shift by Germany, Russia’s biggest energy customer, that could deprive Moscow of a large revenue stream within days.</p> <p>Attempts to increase economic pressure on Russia come amid hopes of more evacuations from the besieged city of Mariupol, while the US warned that Moscow was preparing to formally annex the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the country’s east.</p> <p>“The reports state that Russia plans to engineer referenda upon joining sometime in mid-May,” said Michael Carpenter, the US ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe on Monday. He said that Russia was considering a similar plan in a third region, Kherson, where Moscow has recently solidified control and imposed use of its ruble currency.</p> <p>The European Commission is expected to propose a sixth package of EU sanctions this week against Russia over its 24 February invasion of Ukraine, including a possible embargo on buying Russian oil.</p> <p>Kyiv says Russia’s energy exports to Europe, so far largely exempt from international sanctions, are funding the Kremlin war effort with millions of euros every day.</p> <p>“This package should include clear steps to block Russia’s revenues from energy resources,” Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address on Monday.</p>

Germany said on Monday it was prepared to back an immediate EU embargo on Russian oil. “We have managed to reach a situation where Germany is able to bear an oil embargo,” German economy minister Robert Habeck said.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who has been more cautious than other Western leaders in backing Ukraine, has been under growing pressure to take a firmer line.

Scholz vowed sanctions will not be lifted until Russian president Vladimir Putin signs a peace deal with Ukraine that Kyiv can support, he said in an interview with ZDF public television.

Weaning Europe off Russian oil is likely to be easier than reducing dependence on Russian natural gas. Moscow has demanded European customers pay for gas in roubles, which the EU rejects. Last week, Moscow cut off supplies to Poland and Bulgaria.

EU ministers meeting on Monday warned that complying in full with Moscow’s demand for gas payments in roubles would breach existing EU sanctions. Ambassadors from EU countries will discuss the proposed oil sanctions when they meet on Wednesday.

The moves came as Zelenskiy said the Mariupol evacuation effort was continuing and he expected more movement of people through humanitarian corridors on Tuesday from Berdyansk, Tokmak and Vasylivka. Mariupol’s city council said evacuations would restart at 7am local time (0400 GMT) on Tuesday.

Hundreds remain trapped in underground bunkers and tunnels beneath the sprawling Azovstal industrial site – the last stronghold of resistance to Russia’s siege of the devastated southern port city – which Moscow’s forces resumed shelling overnight.

“The situation has become a sign of a real humanitarian catastrophe,” Ukraine’s deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk said, with supplies of water, food and medicine fast running out.

Some evacuees were initially taken to a village held by Moscow-backed separatists, but later allowed to continue to Ukrainian-held territory if they wanted.

However, while the head of the Donetsk military administration said more evacuations under a UN/Red Cross plan were set to begin on Monday morning, by late afternoon the buses had not reached the agreed pickup point.

Speaking earlier from the Russian-controlled town of Bezimenne, evacuee Natalia Usmanova, 37, said after leaving the steelworks that she became hysterical whenever the bunker started to shake. “I was so worried it would cave in – I had terrible fear,” she told Reuters, recalling widespread terror and a lack of oxygen underground.

Mariupol, which is almost entirely held by Russian forces, is a key target because its capture would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, open up a land corridor to Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014, and free up troops for what has become the main focus of the invasion: achieving full control of the eastern Donbas region.

Ukraine said on Monday it had formally closed the Black and Azov seaports of Kherson, Mariupol, Berdiansk and Skadovsk, all of which have been captured by Russian forces. The World Food Programme said about 4.5m tonnes of grain was [stuck in Ukrainian ports](#).

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HEADLINE	05/02 Pakistan, India suffer in extreme heatwaves
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/02/pakistan-india-heatwaves-water-electricity-shortages

For the past few weeks, Nazeer Ahmed has been living in one of the hottest places on Earth. As a brutal heatwave has swept across India and [Pakistan](#), his home in Turbat, in Pakistan's Balochistan region, has been suffering through weeks of temperatures that have repeatedly hit almost 50C (122F), unprecedented for this time of year. Locals have been driven into their homes, unable to work except during the cooler night hours, and are facing critical shortages of water and power.

Ahmed fears that things are only about to get worse. It was here, in 2021, that the world's highest temperature for May was recorded, a staggering 54C. This year, he said, feels even hotter. "Last week was insanely hot in Turbat. It did not feel like April," he said.

As the heatwave has exacerbated massive energy shortages across [India](#) and Pakistan, Turbat, a city of about 200,000 residents, now barely receives any electricity, with up to nine hours of load shedding every day, meaning that air conditioners and refrigerators cannot function. "We are living in hell," said Ahmed.

It has been a similar story across the subcontinent, where the realities of climate change are being felt by more than 1.5 billion people as the scorching summer temperatures have arrived two months early and the relief of the monsoons are months away. North-west and central India experienced the hottest April in 122 years, while Jacobabad, a city in Pakistan's Sindh province, hit 49C on Saturday, one of the highest April temperatures ever recorded in the world.

The heatwave has already had a devastating impact on crops, including wheat and various fruits and vegetables. In India, the yield from wheat crops has dropped by up to 50% in some of the areas worst hit by the extreme temperatures, worsening fears of global shortages following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has already had a devastating impact on supplies.

In Balochistan's Mastung district, known for its apple and peach orchards, the harvests have been decimated. Haji Ghulam Sarwar Shahwani, a farmer, watched in anguish as his apple trees blossomed more than a month early, and then despair as the blossom sizzled and then died in the unseasonal dry heat, almost killing off his entire crop. Farmers in the area also spoke of a "drastic" impact on their wheat crops, while the area has also recently been subjected to 18-hour power cuts.

"This is the first time the weather has wreaked such havoc on our crops in this area," Shahwani said. "We don't know what to do and there is no government help. The cultivation has decreased; now very few fruits grow. Farmers have lost billions because of this weather. We are suffering and we can't afford it."

Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's minister for climate, told the Guardian that the country was facing an "existential crisis" as climate emergencies were being felt from the north to south of the country.

Rehman warned that the heatwave was causing the glaciers in the north of the country to melt at an unprecedented rate, and that thousands were at risk of being caught in flood bursts. She also said that the sizzling temperatures were not only impacting crops but water supply as well. "The water reservoirs dry up. Our big dams are at dead level right now, and sources of water are scarce," she said.

Rehman said the heatwave should be a wake-up call to the international community. "Climate and weather events are here to stay and will in fact only accelerate in their scale and intensity if global leaders don't act now," she said.

Experts said the scorching heat being felt across the subcontinent was likely a taste of things to come as global heating continues to accelerate. Abhiyanti Tiwari, an assistant professor and programme manager at the Gujarat Institute of Disaster Management, said "the extreme, frequent, and long-lasting spells of heatwaves are no more a future risk. It is already here and is unavoidable."

The World Meteorological Organisation said in a statement that the temperatures in India and Pakistan were "consistent with what we expect in a changing climate. Heatwaves are more frequent and more intense and starting earlier than in the past."

	<p>A heatwave is declared when the maximum temperature is over 40C and at least 4.5C above normal.</p> <p>Over the weekend in India, Bikaner was the hottest place in the country at 47.1C, according to the India Meteorological Department. However, in some parts of north-west India, images captured by satellites showed that surface land temperatures had exceeded 60C – unprecedented for this time of year when usual surface temperatures are between 45 and 55C.</p> <p>“The hottest temperatures recorded are south-east and south-west of Ahmedabad, with maximum land-surface temperatures of around 65C,” the European Space Agency said on its website.</p> <p>The high temperatures have put massive pressure on power demand in both India and Pakistan, where people have had to endure hours of power cuts amid the crippling heat. On Friday, the peak power demand in India touched an all-time high of 207,111MW, according to the government.</p> <p>India is facing its worst electricity shortage in six decades. Power cuts lasting upwards of eight hours have been imposed in states including Jharkhand, Haryana, Bihar, Punjab and Maharashtra as domestic coal supplies have fallen to critical levels and the price of imported coal has soared. In a bid to speed up the transport of coal across the country, Indian Railways cancelled more than 600 passenger and postal train journeys to make way for transportation of coal to power plants.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 EU faces Russia demand to pay in rubles
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/02/eu-to-reject-moscow-demands-to-pay-roubles-for-russian-gas
GIST	<p>Europe is facing a crunch point in mid-May when EU member states will have to reject Moscow’s demands for fuel payments to be made in roubles – despite being without alternative gas supply, Brussels has warned.</p> <p>Kadri Simson, the European commissioner for energy, said on Monday that the Kremlin’s demands had to be rebuffed despite the risks of an interruption to supply at a time that the shortfall cannot be made good.</p> <p>Last week, Gazprom suspended its gas flow to Poland and Bulgaria and threatened the supply of others if they should follow Warsaw and Sofia in failing to pay for fuel in the Russian currency.</p> <p>After a meeting of EU energy ministers, Simson said that all the energy ministers had accepted that paying in roubles through the mechanism set out by Russia would breach sanctions imposed by the bloc after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>She added that she had not heard of any European energy company that was preparing to comply with Moscow despite suggestions to the contrary from Gazprom and firms such as MOL of Hungary.</p> <p>Simson said: “Many European energy companies are due to make the next payment to Gazprom in mid-May and are trying to understand better what they should do and we need to give them the clarity that paying in roubles through the conversion mechanism managed by the Russian public authorities and a second dedicated account at Gazprom bank is a violation of the sanctions and cannot be accepted.”</p> <p>In 2021, the EU imported 155bn cubic metres of natural gas from Russia, accounting for about 45% of EU gas imports and close to 40% of its total gas consumption.</p> <p>In the last year, this dependency has been reduced but the reliance on Russian fossil fuel remains so high that there is no alternative that could fully compensate for its loss.</p> <p>It is understood that the next major date for payments for gas by European energy companies is 20 May.</p>

The potential standoff comes as the EU considers phasing in a ban on Russian oil, a move that Germany's economy minister, Robert Habeck, said on Monday would lead to a major economic hit and higher prices for consumers.

Habeck said Germany was not opposed to such a ban but he warned that Europeans needed to be prepared for the consequences and that some countries would be hit harder than others.

He said: "We will be harming ourselves, that much is clear. It's inconceivable that sanctions won't have consequences for our own economy and for prices in our countries.

"We as Europeans are prepared to bear [the economic strain] in order to help Ukraine. But there's no way this won't come at a cost to us."

Under the draft sixth round of sanctions to be discussed by EU ambassadors on Wednesday, a ban on the import of Russian oil would be enacted by the end of the year, although Hungary has said it could block the proposal if alternatives are not successfully found.

Anna Moskwa, Poland's climate and environment minister, said Warsaw, which has been investing heavily in liquefied natural gas terminals, would be prepared to help any EU country that needed alternatives to Russian fossil fuels.

She said: "We will call for immediate sanctions on Russian oil and gas. This is the next, and urgent, and absolute step. We already have coal. Now it's time for oil, and [the] second step is for gas. The best option is take them all together."

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HEADLINE	05/03 Day 69 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/03/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-69-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some of the first civilians to be evacuated from a giant steel plant in Mariupol reportedly arrived on Monday in the Ukrainian-held city of Zaporizhzhia after an overnight bus journey stymied by delays across the frontline. More than 100 civilians – mostly women, children and elderly people – were evacuated from the Azovstal steel plant, Ukraine's military police said in a statement. Hundreds of people are believed to still be remained trapped in the last stronghold of resistance in the city.• A Russian rocket strike hit the Black Sea port city of Odesa in south-western Ukraine, causing deaths and injuries. The strike hit a strategically important bridge across the Dniester estuary. A 14-year-old boy was killed and a 17-year-old girl was wounded, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Monday. "How did these children and the dormitory threaten the Russian state?" Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address.• Russian forces in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine – where the bulk of the fighting is taking place – are suffering from poor command and control, low morale, and less than ideal logistics, the US says. "We continue to see minimal, at best, progress by the Russians in the Donbas," a senior US Defense Department official, has said.• The UN human rights office (OHCHR) has said that the death toll of civilians killed in Ukraine since the start of the Russian invasion has exceeded 3,000 people. Most of the victims were killed by explosive weapons with a wide impact area, such as missile strikes and airstrikes, the rights office said, without attributing responsibility.• Russian troops are reportedly destroying historical tombs in Ukraine's Kherson region, according to Ukrainian officials. Via Twitter, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that Russian troops were destroying 1,000-year-old Scythian tombs in Kherson by "arranging firing positions on them".• Russia is planning to annex Donetsk and Luhansk after failing to gain Kyiv and overthrow the government there, the US ambassador to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe told reporters. Russia might also consider doing the same in Kherson, where it is already imposing roubles as the official currency.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The director of the United Nations World Food Programme in Germany has warned that millions of tonnes of grain is stuck in Ukraine due to seaports being blocked by Russian military action. Martin Frick said about 4.5m tonnes of grain in containers at Ukrainian ports could not be shifted due to unsafe or occupied sea routes, some of which had been mined, as well as inaccessible ports. • Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, was asked to address how Russia could say it needed to "denazify" the country when its president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, is Jewish, in an interview with Italian TV. Lavrov responded that Adolf Hitler "had Jewish blood" and that the "most rabid antisemites tend to be Jews" while defending Russia's policy of "denazification" in Ukraine, the Kremlin's term for a sweeping purge that Ukraine says is a pretext for "mass murder." • Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said Lavrov's comments showed that "Russia has forgotten all the lessons of the second world war". Israel has summoned the Russian ambassador and demanded an apology and world leaders condemned the remarks. • Britain has said it will provide £300m (\$375m) more in military aid to Ukraine, including electronic warfare equipment and a counter-battery radar system, on top of around £200m pounds of assistance so far, Reuters reports. • Boris Johnson will hail Ukraine's resistance against tyranny as an exemplar for the world as he delivers a virtual address to the country's parliament on Tuesday. Johnson will become the first world leader to address the Verkhovna Rada since the conflict began. • More than 70 of 90 M-777 howitzers the US planned to send are now in Ukrainian hands, along with over 140,000 155 mm rounds, a senior official with the US department of defense said. • The European commissioner for energy, has said that Russia's demands for fuel payments to be made in roubles had to be rebuffed despite the risks of an interruption to supply at a time without alternative gas supply. After a meeting of EU energy ministers, Kadri Simson said that all the energy ministers had accepted that paying in roubles through the mechanism set out by Russia would breach sanctions imposed by the bloc after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. • Germany said it was prepared to back an immediate EU embargo on Russian oil, a major shift from Moscow's biggest energy customer that could let Europe impose such a ban within days. "We have managed to reach a situation where Germany is able to bear an oil embargo," German economy minister Robert Habeck said Monday in Brussels, where he met with EU colleagues. "This means it won't be without consequences." • Russia has rerouted internet traffic in the occupied Ukrainian region of Kherson through Russian communications infrastructure, the internet service disruption monitor NetBlocks said on Monday. • The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has banned Russian football clubs from participation in the 2022-23 seasons in the Champions League, Europa League and Uefa Nations League. Russia's bid to host the Euro 2028 and Euro 2032 tournaments is also no longer eligible.
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HEADLINE	05/02 WFP: 4.2M tons grain stuck in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/02/millions-tonnes-grain-stuck-ukraine-un-wfp-official-germany
GIST	<p>The director of the United Nations World Food Programme in Germany has warned that millions of tonnes of grain is stuck in Ukraine due to sea ports being blocked by Russian military action.</p> <p>Martin Frick said about 4.5 million tonnes of grain in containers at Ukrainian ports could not be shifted due to unsafe or occupied sea routes, some of which had been mined, as well as inaccessible ports.</p> <p>"None of the grain can be used right now. It is just sitting there," Frick told the German news agency dpa.</p> <p>Ukraine is one of the world's leading producers of wheat as well as being a major corn producer. About 30m tonnes of corn and about 25m tonnes of wheat were harvested in the country in 2020, according to</p>

the UN. Many countries in north Africa in particular are dependent for their basic food provision on low-cost wheat from [Ukraine](#).

“The world urgently needs these items of food from Ukraine,” Frick said.

Despite the abundance of crops still available in Ukraine, the World [Food](#) Programme (WFP) said that since the start of the invasion on 24 February, it had had to provide 2.5 million Ukrainians with food support – the majority of them in Ukraine, as well as several hundred thousand in neighbouring Moldova.

“Foodstuffs have to reach those in Ukraine who are trapped and in need. But at the same time there is the need to provide other parts of the world with foodstuffs they are expecting from Ukraine, in order to alleviate a global food crisis,” Frick said.

Access to the ports for both incoming and outgoing goods was blocked, he said. He added that he feared food supplies were being used as a weapon in the conflict. “Hunger must not be used as a weapon, neither from a military, nor from an economic standpoint,” he said.

The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has responded to the food crisis by pledging [Germany](#) would step in and help where there are food shortages as a result of the war, warning of the strong possibility of a global food crisis.

“This war will have consequences, consequences across the world,” he said on Sunday, addressing protesters who accused him of prolonging the war by sending weaponry into the country. “Right now we must concern ourselves with the fact that there are some people who will starve, that there are countries which will be unable to afford grain for their people and that this whole war situation could lead to a global hunger crisis.”

It was last week confirmed by the German government and DB Cargo, the logistics arm of the national rail operator, that plans to enable blocked supplies of grain as well as supplies elsewhere in the country, amounting to around 20m tonnes, to leave the country via rail were being worked on.

The plan, being called a “*Getreidebrücke*” or grain bridge, involves cooperation between Ukrainian Railways and the national rail operators of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania to ensure a network of interconnected routes across [Europe](#).

“We are currently working on concrete details as to precisely how the grain bridge could be realised,” Michael Theurer, a parliamentary state secretary in the transport ministry, told the financial daily Handelsblatt. Theurer said leaving aside the logistical challenges, among the sticking points of the plan that were being hammered out by the finance, agriculture, economics and development ministries were how to finance the measures and legal questions over competition neutrality.

The trains that would be sent into Ukraine would be also bringing much-needed agricultural machinery, including tractors and replacement parts, to support farmers who are sowing seeds for summer crops.

The operation is an extension of DB Cargo’s campaign “railbridge for relief aid” campaign, which began in March. Each train can transport 52 containers, amounting to several thousand tonnes of aid.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Sound Transit board members frustration
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/sound-transit-board-members-express-frustration-with-lack-of-accountability-for-non-paying-riders
GIST	SEATTLE - The Sound Transit board adopted a new fare enforcement policy that is fraught with accountability issues and could be running afoul of state law, according to some of its members.

The latest projections show a \$1.3 billion drop in revenues over the next 25 years if the transit agency can't get everyone that takes a ride to pay for it.

Late last week, the Sound Transit Board adopted a new fare enforcement policy that, at its core, relies on non-police officers to do fare enforcement.

No longer will Transit Police be involved in detaining and citing riders who don't pay. Instead, it will fall to fare ambassadors.

If ambassadors catch a person who can't produce a ticket or a debit on their Orca card to prove they paid for the ride, they can give at least two warnings before a potential penalty is imposed.

If a person is caught a fifth time, a \$124 fine can be issued, along with a potential trip to the district court. An unpaid fine would go to a collection agency.

However, any type of enforcement is difficult because non-paying riders do not have to reveal who they are.

During the meeting, a Sound Transit staff told board member said that the only person who can legally demand proof of identity is a police officer. Fare ambassadors are not police officers.

"Those cheating a***** that refuse to identify themselves are completely off the hook," Board Member and King County Council Member Dave Upthegrove said during the meeting.

Sound Transit approves new fare compliance policy

Sound Transit has approved a new policy for people who are not paying their light rail fare, now giving out warnings before facing fines.

Seattle Mayor and Board Member Bruce Harrell pointed out that state law doesn't require anyone to carry identification.

"It puts the fare ambassador in a sort of precarious spot to really ask for something that that doesn't seem to be enforceable," Harrell said.

On Monday, Orca-- which provides a payment system that riders of seven different transit agencies use-- unveiled new ticket machines, a website, a mobile app, new card reader and cards to members of the media.

Should fare enforcement ambassadors scan a person's Orca card to see if they paid for ride, all they will see is whether the person paid for that particular trip and not their history ridership or any past violations, an Orca official said.

A Sound Transit staff member admitted there is a 'deficiency' in the issue of getting people to produce their identification when it's not a police officer that is asking for it.

The agency says it hopes to can solve that problem, but it hasn't "been able to figure it out".

Sound Transit says the average rider comes in contact with a fare compliance officer once every 23 trips.

Upthegrove as well as other Board Members harped on the issue of no accountability for a rider's non-payment if they can't force a rider to produce identification.

"An ambassador that encounters a rider that did not pay their fare, and the rider gives the middle finger instead of identifying themselves, there's no accountability," Upthegrove said.

	<p>"It's not about the \$3.50. It's about ensuring that riders have to pay for the system they're using, as we promised the voters when we passed Sound Transit" said Board Member and Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin.</p> <p>"If we don't have a consequence at the end of the day, why does anyone pay for this system?" Franklin said.</p> <p>The Board ended up accepting the new policy that includes giving authority to fare ambassadors to ask for identification.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 CONCACAF Champions League Final 4 May
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/concacaf-champions-league-final-to-bring-thousands-to-lumen-field https://www.q13fox.com/sports/what-is-concacaf-how-do-i-watch-sounders-vs-pumas-in-champions-league-final
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The CONCACAF Champions League Final will pack Lumen Field Wednesday.</p> <p>Excitement is building for soccer fans as if the Sounders clinch the championship. It means huge bragging rights for the team and Major League Soccer and their standing beyond the states.</p> <p>While the area around Lumen Field is not bustling yet, restaurants are taking deliveries and businesses are preparing for thousands of fans. More than 60,000 are expected to fill seats when the championship kicks off.</p> <p>A few select fans tapped to volunteer for pre-match ceremonies on field shared their excitement with FOX 13 News.</p> <p>"They're always fierce and fun to watch," said Jon Guncay. "The Sounders, you can never sleep on them."</p> <p>"I'm just excited to go out on the field to participate for the event," said Courtney Gray.</p> <p>The Seattle Sounders are set to play Liga MX's Pumas UNAM Wednesday night in the second leg of the CONCACAF Champions League final at Lumen Field.</p> <p>"A big win here will earn us some credibility on the world stage," said Albert Yao.</p> <p>Tickets for the match are going fast, including for cheaper seats that can run shy of \$80. For seats closer to the field, tickets climb towards \$400.</p> <hr/> <p>SEATTLE - The Seattle Sounders are set to play Liga MX's Pumas UNAM Wednesday night in the second leg of the CONCACAF Champions League final at Lumen Field.</p> <p>This is the club's first continental championship, with the CONCACAF Champions League trophy and a spot in the FIFA Club World Cup on the line.</p> <p>Last week, the Sounders rallied last week for a 2-2 draw with Pumas in the first leg in Mexico City.</p> <p>The club is seeking to be the first MLS team to win the CCL.</p> <p>What is CONCACAF? It stands for the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF).</p>

CONCACAF Champions League is an annual tournament that involves the best teams from North America, Central America and the Caribbean.

Multiple [Major League Soccer](#) teams play in this tournament every year, which is how the Sounders played New York City FC in the semifinals, in matches that were completely separate from regular-season play.

The winner of this tournament advances to the 2023 FIFA Club World Cup, which includes the winners from each of the other regions across the world: the best club from Asia, from Africa, South America, Oceania, and the most well-known, UEFA Champions League in Europe, which this year has narrowed its field to Real Madrid, Liverpool, Manchester City and Villareal.

Are there away goals in the Champions League Final? Is there overtime?

While the UEFA Champions League did away with away goals for 2022, the North American competition has not. The CONCACAF Champions League still uses the away goals rule for matchups with two legs.

Away goals are used as a tiebreaker through for Champions League matchups through the semifinals.

However, the rule changes for the final and away goals are NOT counted. If the score remains tied at the end of the second leg of the final, two 15-minute periods of extra time will be played. If it is still tied after the 30 extra minutes, then the winner will be determined by a shootout.

Has an MLS team ever won the CONCACAF?

Multiple teams have made it as far as the final but no MLS club has won.

Where is the final? How can I watch it?

Seattle will host the match at [Lumen Field](#) on Wednesday, May 4. It's at 7 p.m. and will [air on FS1](#).

Is it sold out?

Last week, the Sounders announced that it is on track to break a CONCACAF Champions League (CCL) attendance record with 61,000 tickets already sold for the second leg of the CCL Final against Pumas.

The last time a Sounders FC home match surpassed an attendance of 60,000 was the 2019 MLS Cup Final, when 69,274 fans were on-hand to see the Rave Green defeat Toronto FC 3-1 in the highest-attended soccer match in the history of [Washington state](#).

Gates are scheduled to open at 5 p.m. and fans who plan to go are encouraged to arrive early due to crowds.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Demonstrators flock to Supreme Court
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/02/us/roe-v-wade-abortion-supreme-court
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Just hours after reports emerged that a majority of justices had voted to strike down Roe v. Wade and the abortion protections it enshrines, scores of protesters began to assemble outside the Supreme Court, flowing into the area well into the early morning hours on Tuesday.</p> <p>The mood outside the court was a mix of anger and mourning, with some demonstrators sitting silently in front of a long line of candles, while others formed a roving circle, shouting defiant chants about the news.</p> <p>The scene on early Tuesday echoed the hastily assembled late-night vigil held after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in 2020, which even then seemed to cast doubt on the future of abortion rights.</p> <p>But many who arrived at the court said the leaked document proved that a showdown over abortion rights was imminent.</p>

	<p>Jack Lilley, a junior at American University, said he had come immediately after hearing the news, despite being in the middle of finals week.</p> <p>“It is 12:30 in the morning, and unfortunately, we have to be at the Supreme Court because our government isn’t supporting and uplifting women and we have to use the time that we should be spending studying to be here,” he said.</p> <p>The crowd that assembled on Tuesday was markedly younger and more vocal than the one that came to honor Justice Ginsburg.</p> <p>A group of demonstrators with a megaphone shouted expletives toward Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., who wrote the leaked draft opinion.</p> <p>When a small group of people arrived to celebrate the apparent momentum toward limiting access to abortion, a much larger group of protesters moved to drive them away from the area outside the court.</p> <p>Many who were still arriving at the court early on Tuesday expressed dismay that the court was moving away from what once appeared to be settled law.</p> <p>“I’m disappointed in the Supreme Court, and I’m disappointed that we found out through a leak,” said Celina Bamber, a law student in Washington. “It just makes the trust in the court completely gone, to find out this momentous decision through a leak — it’s appalling.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Kyiv residents cautiously return
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/world/europe/kyiv-ukraine-russia-war.html
GIST	<p>It had been a sound missing from Ukraine’s capital for months. Then, on a balmy spring afternoon, the chatter of children’s voices again filled a playground.</p> <p>In a park beside the sky-blue cathedral of St. Michael’s Golden-Domed Monastery, in central Kyiv, a few young children clambered over a jungle gym and rocked on a seesaw.</p> <p>Mothers stood idly by, chatting. The scene captured the mood of Kyiv these days, as tension slowly seeps out of a city that for weeks had been in the grips of an almost unimaginable, electric state of alarm.</p> <p>In the early days of the war, families fled. The thud of artillery echoed through the streets. Countless sandbag checkpoints went up. And looming over the city was the prospect of fighting in the streets or a drawn-out siege.</p> <p>Now, a month after the Ukrainian Army defeated the Russian forces that had partly encircled Kyiv, the city is enjoying a return to something like normalcy.</p> <p>For most of April, more residents returned to the capital than left, though the mayor has recommended that most families refrain from returning while threats from the ongoing war linger.</p> <p>The prewar population of the metropolitan area of Kyiv was about four million; it dropped by half over a few hectic days in February. Despite some families returning, many people with children remain in western Ukraine or as refugees in Europe, facing an uncertain future.</p> <p>Back in March, Honey Café, a cozy bakery and coffee shop on Yaroslaviv Val Street that for unclear reasons reopened for business quickly, seemed the only spot in town to sit down for coffee. Even so, waiters warned, “Don’t sit near the windows,” lest an explosion spray glass shards.</p>

Today, sidewalk cafes are popping up throughout Kyiv. Some restaurants are packed again, the once usual, if unwelcome, state of affairs. At Tin Tin Food Spot, a restaurant beside the city's bicycle racing track, a lunchtime crowd filled every seat on Sunday afternoon.

The mood of the residents is one of deep gratefulness: that the city is still standing, that life can resume. It has made for a general sense of bonhomie.

On a recent hourslong walk, meandering through the cobblestone back streets of the Golden Gate and Podil neighborhoods, passers-by smiled or nodded pleasantly.

The chestnut trees were in bloom. And from time to time, on the crests of hills, the city's still-intact skyline of golden church cupolas and high-rise buildings came into view.

To be sure, the war is still raging in eastern Ukraine. Cities like Mariupol and Kharkiv are shelled daily. And few in Kyiv discount another attempt on the capital, should the Russian Army muster the strength. Tens of thousands of residents of Kyiv have relatives in combat in the east who are in grave danger.

The vicious street fighting and widespread human rights abuses by the Russian Army in Kyiv's suburban towns, including Irpin and Bucha, left residents traumatized and most likely facing months or years of emotional adjustment before any sense of safety returns, officials and aid workers have said.

And countless families have been separated as they have been forced to flee their homes, either as internally displaced people or as refugees to other countries in Europe.

Russian cruise missiles, fired from hundreds of miles away, still target the capital from time to time, striking military sites and residential buildings. But they are isolated strikes, for now posing little general risk to residents.

And so, after weeks of upheaval and clenched nerves, Kyiv has become a city where, at the least, just one ordinary spring day can again be enjoyed as a small blessing.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Israel: Russia FM comments anti-Semitic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/world/europe/israel-russian-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov.html
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM — The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, condemned on Monday a recent claim by the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, that Jews were “the biggest antisemites.”</p> <p>The Israeli Foreign Ministry also summoned the Russian ambassador to Israel to explain Mr. Lavrov's remarks, while the Israeli foreign minister, Yair Lapid, demanded an apology.</p> <p>The backlash followed an interview Mr. Lavrov gave on Sunday to an Italian television journalist who asked him why Russia claimed to be “denazifying” Ukraine when the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, was Jewish. Mr. Lavrov replied that he thought Hitler himself had Jewish roots, a claim dismissed by historians, and added, “For a long time now we’ve been hearing the wise Jewish people say that the biggest antisemites are the Jews themselves.”</p> <p>Mr. Bennett said that he viewed Mr. Lavrov's remarks with the “utmost severity,” saying that the comments were “untrue and their intentions are wrong.”</p> <p>Mr. Bennett added, “The goal of such lies is to accuse the Jews themselves of the most awful crimes in history, which were perpetrated against them, and thereby absolve Israel's enemies of responsibility.”</p> <p>Separately, Mr. Lapid said that Mr. Lavrov's comments were “both an unforgivable and outrageous statement as well as a terrible historical error.”</p>

“Jews did not murder themselves in the Holocaust,” he added. “The lowest level of racism against Jews is to accuse Jews themselves of antisemitism.”

The Israeli government’s response is among the fiercest criticism it has leveled at the Russian government since [the invasion of Ukraine](#).

Israel has been engaged in a tricky balancing act: supporting Ukraine while trying to avoid a showdown with Russia, which has a large military presence in Syria, Israel’s neighbor. Israel coordinates with Russia when striking Iranian, Syrian or Lebanese military targets on Syrian soil, and does not want to unduly rock its relationship with Moscow. Israel is also concerned about possible fallout for Russian Jews.

In general, Israeli officials are very sensitive about how the Holocaust is invoked by politicians abroad. Mr. Zelensky himself was criticized in Israel when, during [a virtual address in March to the country’s Parliament](#), he compared the suffering of Ukrainians to that of Jews during the Holocaust.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Beijing reopens mass isolation center
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/world/beijing-isolation-center-lockdown.html
GIST	<p>The authorities in Beijing on Monday said that they had reopened a mass coronavirus isolation center, the latest in a raft of measures to try to stave off a citywide lockdown.</p> <p>While Beijing has recorded only 400 cases since April 22, the move to start using the Xiaotangshan hospital, which has more than 1,000 beds, appears to be aimed at avoiding the fate of Shanghai, which is still under lockdown. The hospital was built in seven days in 2003 to treat patients of the SARS epidemic and was used again in 2020 to treat Covid-19 patients.</p> <p>Officials in Beijing are under immense pressure to quickly stamp out outbreaks. In recent days, they have placed a temporary ban on dining in restaurants, closed schools indefinitely and ordered residents to show proof of a negative test within the past week to enter public spaces, including public transportation.</p> <p>Universal Beijing Resort, one of the city’s major tourist attractions, was also ordered shut just as the five-day May Day holiday started on Saturday. And nearly all of the Chinese capital’s 22 million residents have undergone three rounds of testing.</p> <p>So far, the scale of the outbreak appears to be limited. On Monday, officials announced 50 new cases, down from the 59 reported on Sunday. At a news conference on Sunday, health officials said that they had successfully sequenced dozens of cases and established clear chains of transmission.</p> <p>By acting early, officials in Beijing are hoping to avoid a punishing lockdown similar to the one in Shanghai during the past month. Since the beginning of March, Shanghai has reported more than 550,000 cases, leading officials to institute harsh quarantine measures that have resulted in shortages of food and supplies as well as protests.</p> <p>Cases in Shanghai are now falling. On Monday, the authorities reported about 6,600 new infections, down from 7,800 the day before. In recent days, the local government has shuttered several mass quarantine sites that had been used to house patients.</p> <p>Concerns remain about China’s population of older adults, who have emerged as one of the most vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Just over half of people 80 and older have had two shots, and less than 20 percent of that age group have received a booster, Zeng Yixin, a vice minister of the National Health Commission, said in March.</p> <p>Over the weekend, the authorities were put on alert after several videos were widely shared on Chinese social media showing workers in protective suits unzipping a body bag and wheeling it back into a home for the</p>

	<p>care of older adults in Shanghai. On Monday, local officials confirmed that a person had been put into a body bag while still alive, according to Chinese state media. The officials added that the person had since been transferred to a hospital and was showing stable vital signs.</p> <p>Chinese state media later reported that four people had been dismissed from their posts in connection with the incident, including two local officials overseeing care for older adults and the director of the nursing home.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 California Covid cases rising; new wave?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/california-coronavirus-cases-rising-is-a-new-wave-coming/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — After months of declining numbers, California has recorded a nearly 30% increase in coronavirus cases over the last week along with smaller rises in hospitalizations, causing some health officials to suspect that the state is headed into a new pandemic wave.</p> <p>The increase coincides with a loosening of COVID-19 restrictions such as mask mandates and vaccine verification rules as well as the rise of new subvariants of the highly transmissible omicron strain. The question now is how much higher cases will go and whether new government intervention will be needed.</p> <p>“We’re expecting a small surge that may mirror something that we saw in delta last summer, in early July, but it’s happening now, in May,” Dr. Curtis Chan, deputy health officer for San Mateo County, said in an interview.</p> <p>Chan expects a rise in both hospitalizations and deaths but doesn’t believe a new surge would be as bad as last winter’s omicron wave.</p> <p>“The virus is definitely flowing,” Dr. Matt Willis, Marin County’s health officer, said in an interview. “People need to know the likelihood of an exposure in the community is increasing.”</p> <p>California has been recording about 5,600 coronavirus cases a day over the last week, its highest case rate since early March. California’s latest per capita case rate — 100 cases a week for every 100,000 residents — is just enough to meet the threshold for a high rate of coronavirus transmission, data analyzed by The Times show.</p> <p>Coronavirus-positive hospitalizations have risen 7% in the last week, ticking up to 1,037 statewide as of Saturday. Of them, 146 were in intensive care units, a figure that’s up 13% over the same time period.</p> <p>The number of hospitalizations is still among the lowest levels of the pandemic. But the state’s COVID Assessment Tool ensemble forecast suggests hospitalizations will go up by an additional 65% by Memorial Day and that the number of COVID-19 patients needing intensive care will double by then.</p> <p>On Sunday, the state estimated that the effective coronavirus transmission rate was 1.24. This means each infected Californian is typically transmitting the virus to more than one person, which may indicate the virus’ spread is increasing.</p> <p>San Mateo County has California’s highest coronavirus case rate — with 222 cases a week for every 100,000 residents. San Francisco is second, with a rate of 220. L.A. County’s rate is 127.</p> <p>There’s some speculation that case rates are relatively higher in the Bay Area in part because of a high rate of testing. Still, the data are concerning enough that San Mateo County is warning nursing homes, jails, shelters and similar settings about the need to take additional precautions, Chan said.</p> <p>“We’re certainly seeing it amongst people presenting in urgent care [centers and] emergency rooms,” Chan said. “We’re seeing it in the sewage as well too. So it’s real.”</p>

Just 2½ weeks ago, every California county had a low COVID-19 Community Level as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — colored green on the agency’s maps, reflecting a tier system tied to a combination of case and hospitalization levels. But on Thursday, the CDC designated three counties as having a medium COVID-19 Community Level, placing San Mateo, Santa Cruz and Marin counties in the yellow tier.

The CDC suggests people at high risk for severe disease in those counties consider wearing a mask in indoor public settings. The CDC also suggests that companies, schools and other institutions in those counties consider enacting screening testing for people exposed to the virus at worksites, schools or other settings.

“There are institutional things that each leader of a particular agency or program can do to make their community safer,” Chan said. “This is now that time to activate those responses.”

Since mid-February, when a statewide universal indoor mask mandate was lifted, the state Department of Public Health has issued more stringent advice than the CDC for Californians, strongly recommending universal mask wearing in indoor public settings.

Signs of increasing transmission have emerged statewide. Coronavirus cases in Los Angeles County are up by 40% over the previous week, a trend Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer has not characterized as a new surge, but still referred to as “pretty significant.” In L.A. County, coronavirus levels in wastewater systems have nearly doubled over the last two weeks, and clusters of coronavirus cases — while still at low levels — are climbing at nursing homes, workplaces and schools.

Ferrer said she was hopeful the increase in cases stabilizes fairly soon and that stress on the hospital system will be minimized because of vaccinations and increasing availability of anti-COVID drugs.

Still, no one can guarantee that a universal mandatory mask policy will never return if pandemic trends in hospitals deteriorate dramatically.

Ferrer has said L.A. County is prepared to reinstitute a universal mask order in indoor public settings should conditions worsen so much that the CDC designates L.A. County as having a high COVID-19 Community Level, which means the CDC once again recommends the practice.

One way to get there is for case rates in L.A. County to increase by an additional 60% and the rate of new weekly coronavirus-positive hospital admissions to quintuple.

“Let’s continue to be prepared to take appropriate measures depending on what we’re learning and seeing,” Ferrer said.

Compared with the prior week, coronavirus cases are up by 26% in San Diego County, 35% in Orange and Ventura counties, and 39% in Riverside County. They’re up by 23% in Greater Sacramento, and have risen by 40% in the Bay Area and the San Joaquin Valley.

Over the prior week, coronavirus-positive hospitalizations are up 4% in L.A. County, 26% in Orange County and 12% in the Bay Area.

High school proms have become a focal point for superspreader events. About 90 San Mateo High School students tested positive for the coronavirus after attending prom at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco on April 9. And after attending their prom at San Francisco City Hall on April 16, more than 50 students from Redwood High School in Marin County tested positive for the virus.

In addition, a number of middle school students from Marin County tested positive for the virus after returning from a spring break trip to the nation’s capital.

Local health officials in California aren't making any moves to cancel gatherings such as proms and graduations.

But they are suggesting it's time to be more cautious, given the rapid spread of two omicron subvariants, BA.2 and its even-more-infectious successor, BA.2.12.1.

Marin County health officials recently warned that attending gatherings of 50 or more people — especially when unmasked and indoors — increases risk of coronavirus exposure. In a memo to school officials, Marin County health officials suggested that schools hosting large indoor gatherings consider requiring attendees to show proof of a negative rapid test result and proof of vaccination, and requiring masks indoors.

But it'll be up to schools — not health officials — to decide how to manage proms and graduations, Willis said. And more layers of protection are better than fewer; even if a school decides not to require masks at a prom, the event could be made safer if schools chose to require proof a recent negative test or improved ventilation by opening doors and windows or holding the event outdoors.

If a graduation is held indoors, a step that would create additional safety — short of requiring masking at all times — is asking students to wear their masks while sitting and listening to speakers but allowing them to be removed when they walk across the stage, Chan said.

Even just opening the windows and turning on an air-conditioning system can “substantially decrease the amount of virus in the air well over 50%,” Chan said. “I walk into rooms all the time where people don't have the windows open and they don't have the doors open.”

Although some people have tired of taking measures to guard against a coronavirus infection, health experts emphasize it's still prudent to take precautions. Those who are unvaccinated are at higher risk of severe illness and death, and even for those who are vaccinated, there is still some risk of infection leading to long COVID, in which illness can persist for years, as well as higher risk of heart disease and diabetes.

To reduce risk, L.A. County recently imposed a continued mask mandate at its airports and on its public transit systems. The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit system imposed a similar requirement for its commuter rail network.

Chan said we're now entering a new phase of the pandemic, in which “we're going to have these swells, some small waves and some larger surges that's going to affect California. And understanding the intensity of each surge and wave ... is something that we're all going to need to be wrestling with.”

Chan equated it to reading a weather report, like trying to understand wildfire risk from forecasts about Santa Ana winds and a heat wave. Currently, the East Coast is seeing increasing hospitalizations but not an explosive surge. If it were, California would probably be on a high level of alert.

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HEADLINE	05/02 New Zealand welcomes back tourists
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/new-zealand-welcomes-back-tourists-as-pandemic-rules-eased/
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — New Zealand welcomed tourists from the U.S., Canada, Britain, Japan and more than 50 other countries for the first time in more than two years Monday after dropping most of its remaining pandemic border restrictions.</p> <p>The country has long been renowned for its breathtaking scenery and adventure tourism offerings such as bungee jumping and skiing. Before the spread of COVID-19, more than 3 million tourists visited each year, accounting for 20% of New Zealand's foreign income and more than 5% of the overall economy.</p> <p>But international tourism stopped altogether in early 2020 after New Zealand imposed some of the world's toughest border restrictions.</p>

The border rules remained in place as the government at first pursued an elimination strategy and then tried to tightly control the spread of the virus. The spread of omicron and vaccinations of more than 80% of New Zealand's 5 million population prompted the gradual easing of restrictions.

New Zealand reopened to tourists from Australia three weeks ago and on Monday to about 60 visa-waiver countries, including much of Europe. Most tourists from India, China and other non-waiver countries are still not allowed to enter.

Tourists will need to be vaccinated and to test themselves for the virus before and after arriving.

"Today is a day to celebrate, and is a big moment in our reconnection with the world," said Tourism Minister Stuart Nash.

At Auckland Airport, flights bringing in tourists began landing from early in the morning, coming in direct from places including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore.

The border reopening will help boost tourism ahead of New Zealand's upcoming ski season. But the real test of how much the tourism industry rebounds will come in December, when the peak summer season begins in the Southern Hemisphere nation.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said more than 90,000 people had booked flights to New Zealand in the seven weeks since the reopening was announced and 21 international flights were scheduled to land Monday in Auckland.

"Our tourism industry have felt the effects of the global pandemic acutely, and are working hard to prepare," she said.

Ardern said there were no immediate plans to ease virus testing and vaccination requirements for tourists.

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HEADLINE	05/02 'Mosqueteers' security for Olympia mosque
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/community/facing-race/mosqueteers-volunteers-provide-security-for-olympia-mosque/281-7b0ccfe7-3fac-4cdd-9618-92ac89cbf986
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — In the winter of 2017, leaders of the Islamic Center of Olympia felt they needed to increase security following a series of anti-Muslim acts of vandalism around the country.</p> <p>Instead of installing fences or hiring armed guards, mosque members went to the community for help.</p> <p>They asked for people to sit outside of the mosque during Friday afternoon services, the best-attended of the week.</p> <p>"It's not fair. You should be safe in your house of worship," said Linda Anthony, one of the organizers of the volunteers.</p> <p>A member of the "Mosqueteers" has been present outside the mosque every Friday afternoon since February of 2017.</p> <p>The mosque built a shelter for the volunteers so they don't have to stand out in the elements.</p> <p>"Having somebody out there who is watching makes a big difference to us," said mosque member Mustafa Mohamedali.</p> <p>He said the mosque continues to have threats called in and members have heard people yell obscenities as they drive by, but not during Friday services.</p>

	<p>In November someone left a burning explosive, perhaps fireworks, in the street in front of the mosque. The FBI is investigating that case.</p> <p>More than 100 volunteers came to support the mosque in the days that followed the November incident. Mohamedali would like to see Mosqueteers appear at other places of worship where members feel threatened, no matter their religion.</p> <p>"It's very catchy. Maybe we should register it," said Mohamedali.</p> <p>Seemab Hussaini, from the Oregon chapter of the Council for American Islamic Relations, called the Mosqueteers an "amazing group" in an era where western Washington mosques have been burned and vandalized.</p> <p>"The people that can mobilize to come out and protect us tend to have a lot more freedom and regularity to be able to express love, and that's a beautiful expression of love," said Hussaini. "It's much more powerful and can come out of any moment, compared to hate where it comes out when it's pent up."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Snohomish Co. 45ft. tall trash problem
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/45-foot-tall-mountain-trash-snohomish-county-could-burst-into-flames/OCLQTRLLC5BXTDG57FYVGC4OZE/
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — There's a multimillion-dollar problem piling up in Snohomish County. A 45-foot tall mountain of trash has mounted in the Everett transfer station. Public Works fears the putrid pile, which has been building for weeks, could burst into flames at any moment.</p> <p>"We have staff that are observing the pile every hour, 24 hours a day," said Snohomish County Public Works Director Kelly Snyder. "It could spontaneously combust within the pile itself."</p> <p>The putrid pile began to form in early April and as junk keeps compiling and compressing, the pressure continues to grow. Solid Waste Director David Schonhard says it is only five feet away from reaching the ceiling.</p> <p>"Obviously a fire in a facility on a pile that big is a huge problem to deal with," said Schonhard.</p> <p>If crews don't move the 4,000 tons of throwaways soon, the Airport Road facility may need to temporarily shut down. The impact of this would be significant as it handles 50% of the county's trash.</p> <p>"All of my staff has been putting in extra hours," said Schonhard.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Good to Go? Better check toll bills
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/jesse-jones/good-go-better-check-your-toll-bills/JUKJTM4TNGWRKZXIF2DMODSRI/
GIST	<p>GIG HARBOR, Wash. — Dan Baasch of Gig Harbor and I are going for a ride across the Narrows Bridge to see if the Good to Go tolling system is taking his pocketbook for one, too.</p> <p>For months, he says, the system has forced him to pay extra for trips because it can't read his license plate transponder.</p> <p>"Their equipment doesn't respond to their own equipment," says Baasch.</p> <p>Christina Geery from Belfair says she has the same problem. She's disputed at least 80 charges and believes her wallet's being bled out a quarter at a time by the Good to Go system.</p>

“They’re not charging me the right amount.”

Disappointed?

“Oh, that’s not the word for it,” says Geery. “Probably disgusted would be the best word for it.”

Baasch and Geery keep getting a 25 cent pay-by-plate fee on their Good to Go accounts. The fee hits when the system has to look up a license plate to find out who to charge.

Those with passes or license plate transponders shouldn’t get the extra charge. But these two commuters say they are getting no quarter from Good to Go.

“Because you know, I mean, a quarter a trip is not that much, but damn! Five twenty-five is a lot to pay for a toll!” says Geery.

Baasch started seeing issues with his account late last year. And now?

“It is now 100 percent not registering any of the tolls across the bridge,” says Baasch. “In February I got notice that two of my disputes had been denied and that this vehicle was to go to their walk-in center.”

He sent us an email confirming just that.

Big problem, though: the walk-in centers are closed. Permanently!

Why do customers have to dispute these charges over and over and over again?

Patricia Michaud is the customer service operations manager for the Washington State Department of Transportation Good to Go program. She says Geery’s issues are not systematic. It’s that they got less than optimal customer service.

“She shouldn’t have had to call multiple times to get her issue resolved. We will address that with the call center,” says Michaud.

Michaud says transponders are tested before they are sent to customers. She adds the problems could be that they are ill-fitting or damaged.

But what about the emails sent to Baasch saying to go to a service center for help?

“That’s incorrect information that, again, we need to — we will train, retrain the person who sent that out,” says Michaud.

According to the state, Good to Go sent about 70 of those emails to customers. It is following up to provide them with correct information and will no longer send that communication.

And Good to Go has a new customer service vendor that started in July. It has a staff of nearly 150 people.

“Our previous vendor had staff that were very, very seasoned. They had been with them for years. The staff that we have today are very new l, and they’re working on their seasoning,” says Michaud.

Bottom line

So here’s what you need to know: those license plate transponders have a 3-year warranty.

“You don’t need to mail them. You just call in, and if the pass is broken, if the pass is not being read,” says Michaud, “we will send out a new plate to the customer and replace it if it’s within that warranty.” Remember that trip I took with Baasch to see if he’d have to pay the extra fee?

A few days later he checked his account. Yep, he got charged the extra quarter.

Bottom line: Check those bills and let Good To Go — and me — know if there's a problem. Because there's no reason to get nicked, dined or quartered by the state.

Good to Go says most issues with license plate passes can be avoided with correct installation.

Here's their advice:

- Before installing a license plate pass, remove any license plate frame or bracket and do not replace it. These can interfere with the signal between the pass and the system.
- During installation, position the pass so that it covers the top front of the license plate. Align the screw holes for the pass with the screw holes for the license plate.
- Make sure to tighten the screws so that the pass is sitting flush against the plate and is firmly connected. Check the screws periodically and tighten as needed.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Diesel prices hit records, raising concerns
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/diesel-prices-hit-highs-raising-concerns-truckers-costs-consumers/YGBY6BMDIBHBXA3NZFPF7UQQQA/
GIST	<p>Diesel prices hit nationwide record highs Monday, raising costs for supply chain transit companies and consumers.</p> <p>The nationwide average cost for a gallon of diesel fuel hit a new record Monday, a staggering \$5.32 — marking a \$2.20 increase over averages seen in 2021.</p> <p>In the state of Washington, it is even higher, at \$5.57. Prices in densely populated areas outside the state are even higher.</p> <p>The average price per gallon for diesel sits at \$5.71 in the Seattle-Bellevue-Everett region, and \$5.60 in Tacoma.</p> <p>At a gas station near the Space Needle, a gallon of diesel now costs \$5.89. And at a gas station near the First Street Bridge, it is as high as \$5.99.</p> <p>The numbers are part of a growing trend of a spike in fuel costs. According to the Consumer Price Index, the United States saw a more than 18% increase in costs of fuel over the month of March, the most recent month with available data.</p> <p>So, what's causing diesel prices to spike? According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the retail price of a gallon of diesel reflects the costs and profits (or losses) of producing and delivering the product to consumers.</p> <p>EIA uses four factors to evaluate that: the cost of crude oil purchased by refineries; refining costs and profits; distributing, marketing and retail station costs; and profits and taxes.</p> <p>Right now, those base costs are going up because of shortages and sanctions.</p> <p>The industry was already facing a supply shortage because of a drop in global refining capacity due to COVID-19.</p> <p>Then, it was exacerbated by sanctions on Russian fuel exports to Europe, which sent the global market scrambling for the already limited supply — ultimately, driving up prices.</p> <p>Graham Trucking in SeaTac has been hit hard by the increase. The local company is paying double the amount that it did at the beginning of 2021 — just to fill its fleet.</p> <p>“It's been crazy,” said Graham Trucking manager, Troy Graham.</p>

Troy said the business has 100 trucks in its fleet. Each truck has a 150-to-200-gallon tank and, at the current price of diesel, costs between \$800 and \$1100 to fill up.

This means it costs the company more than \$80,000 to fill the fleet — something it must do multiple times a week.

“You’re not talking about a small amount of money, especially these days,” Troy said.

Nearly every aspect of the supply chain has been impacted by the increases. Trucks, trains, barges, and planes all rely on some type of diesel fuel for operation.

“The [price] swings are just hard to keep up with,” said Troy. “We’re sort of the beginning of it, but there’s trickle-down effects all through the economy from diesel prices.”

“We’re one very small link in the chain, right? So, everybody’s just figuring out a way to make this new norm work,” Troy continued.

The rising prices, in turn, contribute to inflation, which ultimately, comes back to the consumer.

“It makes me worried because I know [the cash loss] needs to be made up for somewhere,” said Troy. “I just don’t think that we’re done dealing with the effects of it being reflected in the pricing that’s ultimately passed down to the consumer.”

Current economic projections on the price of diesel from EIA show prices will continue to increase throughout 2022 and begin to taper off in 2023.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Association data: Seattle tourism rebounds
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/data-shows-seattle-tourism-rebound-despite-some-safety-concerns
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - After pandemic slow-downs, Seattle's tourism and its economy are improving, according to recently released numbers from the Seattle Historic Waterfront Association.</p> <p>On Monday, KOMO spoke to Ivar's president and Waterfront Association volunteer Bob Donegan about the trends.</p> <p>"We've also seen a significant increase in the number of visitors to the waterfront over the last 6 months," Donegan said.</p> <p>Donegan shared data showing unique visitors to the area are quickly increasing. In 2019, the waterfront saw about 6.3 unique visitors. Donegan said the recovery is on track to be back to those pre-pandemic levels by next year.</p> <p>The cruise industry has also made quite the comeback. "The port is predicting 1.3 million passengers will cruise into or out of Seattle. If that holds, it indeed would be the busiest year in Seattle cruise history," he said.</p> <p>All that said, crime data has also shown an increase in Seattle and that includes the waterfront this year when compared to this timeframe last year. The police department has also lost more officers this year.</p> <p>"In '21 to '22, the reason they're not coming downtown has changed to fear for their safety. That's improving as more of the encampments and more of the homeless people get into housing," Donegan said.</p> <p>Donegan gave a message to city leaders: "just keep up the effort to get those people who need help into services and off the street and make it more accessible for people who want to visit."</p>

	<p>A spokesperson with Seattle Police said today: “The downtown core—and other high-foot-traffic areas of the city—have always been areas of focus for our department and officers and we routinely assign officers in cars, on bikes, and on foot to these areas. We will continue to do so, as staffing allows, and will continue to respond to 911 calls in these areas.”</p> <p>A spokesperson with Mayor Bruce Harrell’s office also said, "We are working every day to ensure Seattle is a welcoming, safe, and vibrant place for residents, visitors, and tourists. From the recent return of cruise season to summer vacations just around the corner, we are embracing every opportunity to share what we love about Seattle and highlight the things that make this region special, all while creating good jobs and boosting our economy."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Tacoma firefighters: homeless camp fire
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260981102.html
GIST	<p>Tacoma firefighters on Monday extinguished a fire that burned at a homeless encampment on Puyallup Avenue near downtown and sent a column of dark smoke over the city’s skyline.</p> <p>The fire was reported shortly after 9 a.m. in the 1400 block of Puyallup Avenue, near Portland Avenue, according to Tacoma Fire Department spokesperson Joe Meinecke.</p> <p>He said he wasn’t aware of any injuries.</p> <p>Meinecke said “combustible material” associated with the encampment had burned. He didn’t have more details about precisely what caught fire. Meinecke said fire crews were still working to put out hot spots at about 10 a.m.</p> <p>How the fire started is not yet clear. Meinecke said a fire investigator was called to the scene.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Changes to ORCA fare card system
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/what-you-need-to-know-about-changes-coming-to-the-orca-fare-card-system/
GIST	<p>In just two weeks, the Puget Sound region’s ORCA transit fare card system will migrate to new software, requiring thousands of transit users to create or reestablish their payment accounts.</p> <p>The new website, www.myorca.com, launches May 16. The website currently has explanations of the changes ahead and tips on how to prepare.</p> <p>ORCA (One Regional Card for All) was established in 2009 and operates on King County Metro Transit, Sound Transit, Washington State Ferries, Pierce Transit, Community Transit, Everett Transit, Kitsap Transit, King County Water Taxi, Seattle Center Monorail, and Seattle Streetcar. About 400,000 passengers per weekday paid with fare cards as of late 2019.</p> <p>The new system will let transit customers instantly add money to their fare accounts, instead of fund transfers taking a couple of days, a constant source of public frustration, agency officials said.</p> <p>The weekend of May 14-15 will be fare-free for transit and walk-on ferry passengers as the system changeover occurs.</p> <p>All individual customers, as well as businesses who provide employee passes, must reestablish payment accounts using the new website. About 175,000 individuals and 1,900 businesses who handle auto-pay ORCA accounts need to do that within two weeks of the new site launching if they need June passes by June 1, according to Sound Transit spokesperson Scott Thompson. Previous payments will carry over.</p>

A new MyORCA app will also be available May 16 for both Apple and Android devices, [enabling people to load card value or arrange autopay](#) by phone.

Customers holding employer-sponsored passes need not take action now, but the 1,100-plus participating companies need to register on the new website. The current site, www.orcacard.biz, expires May 12.

The “New ORCA” cards will be black, like the resident whales. However, people holding the 1 million or so blue cards now in circulation may keep using those.

Both the black and blue cards will function at the existing 6,000 or so yellow kiosks at curbsides and stations. About 250 retail stores, twice as many as before, will distribute fare cards, for \$3 plus the initial fare people prepay.

The low-income ORCALift program, where enrollees can ride for a flat rate of \$1.50 per trip, will continue as usual. If transit agencies decide to [reduce the rate to \\$1](#), as is being considered by Sound Transit, the new system can be reprogrammed to accomplish that in two to three weeks, said Chris McKnight, a marketing manager for INIT, the project contractor.

Plans are afoot to launch a “tap by phone” option in 2023 that lets riders substitute a phone-screen image for the plastic card when catching a transit ride.

If Sound Transit and King County Metro bring back [fare enforcement](#) officers, who were removed in mid-2020 because of [unequal impacts on Black](#) and [homeless](#) riders, the privacy of card users won’t be much different from before. When passengers comply with instruction to show their ORCA, fare officers would see only the account number and a payment status, officials said.

A significant share of INIT’s \$80 million, seven-year capital contract pays for network and software capacity that’s going unused in 2022, but will allow flexibility for future ORCA functions, said Brittany Esdaile, ORCA director for Sound Transit. The [original contract](#) was \$60 million with options for a 15-year, \$53 million service agreement.

Other possible uses for ORCA cards have been discussed for years, including paying for park-and-ride space if agencies someday enact daily fees; spending in cafes and other shops like riders can do with the Hong Kong [Octopus Card](#); or tapping for other mobility services, such as ride-hailing or scooter rentals.

Esdaile said the project team needed to launch the next-generation ORCA now, rather than wait for leaders to vote on more uses. Supplies are no longer available for the old version, and the agencies need enough time to install yellow readers in future stations, before Lynnwood, Redmond and Federal Way light-rail extensions open in 2024.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Amazon deepens gloom e-commerce firms
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-02/amazon-deepens-gloom-for-battered-e-commerce-stocks-tech-watch
GIST	<p>The historic rout in Amazon’s share price last week highlights how difficult the environment has become for e-commerce stocks after their pandemic-driven boom, with investors set for another roller coaster in coming days.</p> <p>Etsy, Wayfair and Shopify are hurtling toward earnings reports this week in the shadow of Amazon’s worst sell-off since 2006. The tech giant triggered the rout with a weaker-than-expected revenue forecast, adding to evidence of slowing e-commerce growth.</p>

“It’s a canary in the coal mine,” said Oktay Kavrak, a director and product strategist at Leverage Shares. “If Amazon is hitting a speed bump, other names could crash. People were expecting a slowdown in growth following the pandemic, but I don’t think they expected as drastic a drop as we saw.”

The rally e-commerce stocks saw at the height of COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 has reversed as consumers returned to their pre-pandemic habits and inflation cooled their spending. Amazon executives said they were watching for whether shoppers will trim their purchases to offset rising prices as fuel and labor costs bite.

Etsy has slumped 58% this year, making it the third-worst performer on the S&P 500 Index, while Wayfair has tumbled 60%. Shopify just posted its worst month on record and it is also the biggest loser on Canada’s S&P/TSX Composite Index this year. All these stocks extended their decline Monday.

Despite that relentless selloff, dip buyers have been hard to come by. That might have to do with how expensive they still are. Shopify is trading on a whopping 128 times projected profits over the next 12 months and Wayfair has a multiple near 95, while Etsy’s figure is 21 — suggesting they continue to be priced for rapid growth. That compares with about 17 on the S&P 500 and 21 for the Nasdaq 100.

However, analysts have been paring back their expectations for the upcoming quarterly results. Wayfair’s revenue was projected to fall about 15% this quarter, while the 26% growth expected at Shopify would be its lowest since at least 2014, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Etsy reports on May 4, while Wayfair and Shopify are slated to release results on May 5.

The average consensus for Shopify’s earnings has been reduced about 9% over the past week, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. For Etsy, its average earnings projection has dropped by 2.6% over the past month and is down almost 30% over the past 90 days. Its revenue estimate has declined by more than 9% over the past quarter.

Despite near-term risks, some are staying upbeat when it comes to future growth. Poonam Goyal, a senior retail analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, has a positive view on the long-term prospects for e-commerce.

“We’re very bullish on e-commerce, which should be able to grow at a double-digit clip for the next several years,” she said in a phone interview. “Comparisons will only get easier from here.”

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HEADLINE	05/02 NYC enters higher Covid risk level
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/nyregion/nyc-coronavirus-yellow-risk-level.html
GIST	<p>New York City entered a higher risk level for the coronavirus on Monday, a troubling reminder that the pandemic is not over and that the virus still has the power to harm New Yorkers.</p> <p>The city moved into the medium, or yellow, risk category for virus transmission as cases continued their steady rise, a development that could trigger the return of public health restrictions, although they are not required to be reinstated at this point.</p> <p>The city is now seeing nearly 2,500 new cases per day, a significant jump from about 600 daily cases in early March. The latest rise, fueled by the highly contagious Omicron subvariant known as BA.2, does not rival the first Omicron surge in December and January, but recorded case levels are as high as they were when the Delta variant swept through the city last year.</p> <p>What’s more, case levels in New York and around the country are probably much higher than the official statistics because many residents are testing at home, and positive at-home tests are not typically included in official tallies.</p>

Mayor Eric Adams, who last month contracted his first known case of the virus, will face difficult decisions over whether to bring back mask and vaccine mandates at a time when he is [focused on the city's economic recovery](#) and workers are returning to offices.

Mr. Adams has emphasized that hospitalizations and deaths remain low; there are currently more than 50 new hospitalizations and four or five deaths on average in the city each day. In January, new hospitalizations rose to 1,000 per day, and deaths to more than 120 per day.

New Yorkers had celebrated a six-week lull in cases that began in mid-February, and many of the normal routines of life returned. Friends gathered for celebrations. Workers roamed offices without masks. Subway ridership crept up.

In early March, Mr. Adams [rolled back longstanding restrictions](#), including [mask mandates at schools](#) and proof-of-vaccination requirements at restaurants, gyms and movie theaters. [The mayor stood in Times Square and declared](#): “It’s time to reopen our city.”

But cases soon began to rise again, and Mr. Adams [reversed his plans to end mask requirements at preschools and day cares](#). Several [Broadway shows shut down](#) as the virus spread throughout their casts.

Mr. Adams, a Democrat who took office in January, appears reluctant to bring back mandates.

At a traffic safety announcement in Brooklyn on Monday, Mr. Adams said that officials continued to keep a close eye on case numbers, hospitalizations and deaths from Covid. He said that the city had no immediate plans to reinstitute indoor vaccine mandates for public spaces.

“We’re not there yet,” the mayor said, adding: “We can’t close down the city again. If we make the right decisions, we’re not going to have to worry about doing that.”

Earlier in the briefing, he urged New Yorkers to follow his own example when it came to weathering Covid. The mayor, who says he is vaccinated and boosted, recently emerged from isolation after his bout of the disease.

“I was able to exercise in the morning, no loss of breath, and no conditions other than that,” he said.

“I had a tickle in my throat, immediately went to get tested, found out it was Covid, I went home and stayed home,” he added. “That is where the winning ticket is for our city.”

Mr. Adams has said that he supports keeping a [mask mandate on the subway](#), which Ms. Hochul has maintained for all public transit across the state.

Many New Yorkers might be ready to move past the pandemic, but the virus is spreading rapidly again. As a result, the city should consider bringing back some of the public health restrictions that lapsed, said Gregg Gonsalves, an associate professor of epidemiology at the Yale School of Public Health.

“People can be fed up, angry, tired and frustrated — I am too,” he said. “But wishing the pandemic away doesn’t make it so.”

Mr. Adams introduced the color-coded [alert system](#) in March, based on parameters set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

New York had remained since then at the lowest level of risk, represented by the color green, meaning virus cases had mostly stayed below 200 per 100,000 residents per week; the city has now surpassed that threshold, Dr. Ashwin Vasan, the health commissioner, said Monday.

The alert system lists several steps that Mr. Adams should consider at the [medium level](#): Requiring masks in schools again, and bringing back the city’s system for checking for proof of vaccination at restaurants, gyms and indoor entertainment sites, known as [Key to N.Y.C.](#)

If the city enters the high risk level, represented by the color orange, then Mr. Adams should consider requiring face masks in all public indoor settings, according to the alert system.

State health officials recently announced a troubling new development: [Two new versions of the subvariant](#) — BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1, which appear to spread more rapidly than BA.2 — seem to be behind steep case increases in upstate New York, where [more than 30 counties](#), including those that contain Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Binghamton, have already entered the high community transmission level, according to the C.D.C.

The city’s warning system is also based on a new C.D.C. color-coded system that increased the number of cases needed to ascend an alert level. Under the older version, [most of the Northeast](#), including New York City, would already be considered red, or high transmission areas.

Dr. Jay Varma, the director of the Cornell Center for Pandemic Prevention and Response, said that he was skeptical about the utility of the alert level, because changes to it do not trigger actual policy shifts, and because it doesn’t take into account the rate at which things are worsening.

“The problem is that moving from low to medium on the health department’s website doesn’t really change anything,” said Dr. Varma, who was also a special adviser to former Mayor Bill de Blasio. “It’s very difficult to make an alert level that is not seen as an actual trigger for direct action.”

Nearly 88 percent of adults in the city are fully vaccinated, but the rates are lower among children. Only about 45 percent of adults have received booster doses, which experts say are crucial as protection from initial doses wanes.

Elected officials should not frame the debate as a choice between keeping the economy open and implementing protective measures, Mr. Gonsalves said, noting that when more New Yorkers get sick, it means they cannot go to work.

“Nobody is suggesting that Mayor Adams or Governor Hochul should be shutting down things or going back to April 2020,” he said. “Modest measures to protect the health of New Yorkers are warranted.”

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HEADLINE	05/02 Denmark to destroy soon expire vaccines
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/denmark-to-destroy-excess-soon-to-expire-covid-19-vaccines/
GIST	<p>COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Danish health officials said Monday that 1.1 million excess COVID-19 vaccines will be discarded in the coming weeks because their expiration date is near, and efforts to donate them to developing countries have failed.</p> <p>Statens Serum Institut, a government agency that maps the spread of COVID-19 in Denmark, said the epidemic in the Scandinavian country “is currently under control, and the vaccine coverage in the Danish population is high.”</p> <p>Around 81% of Denmark’s population of 5.8 million has received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, while nearly 62% have received a booster shot.</p> <p>The agency said that Denmark, like most countries across the world, has a surplus of vaccines.</p>

	<p>“Now there are global challenges with the donation of COVID-19 vaccines, (among others) because for the first time during the pandemic, a situation has arisen where the supply of vaccines exceeds the demand,” the agency, known in Denmark as SSI, said in a statement. “This also applies to Denmark.”</p> <p>SSI added that Denmark has donated 9 million doses of vaccines and has been collaborating with other European Union countries to find countries that will receive surplus vaccines.</p> <p>“However, in light of declining demand and lack of roll-out capacity and willingness to be vaccinated in developing countries, it has been difficult for Denmark and other EU countries to find recipient countries for the excess doses,” it said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 New pandemic stage: filtering indoor air
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/the-battle-over-the-air-we-breathe/
GIST	<p>MOUNT VERNON — Inside an airy, stained glass-adorned room at Salem Lutheran Church, the Skagit Valley Chorale is surrounded by reminders of deep heartbreak.</p> <p>Four doorways are propped open, two to the cool, outdoor air. A pair of homemade air cleaners, fashioned from furnace filters, a box fan and duct tape, hum away at the center of the room. A laptop streams video via Zoom. Two small monitors gauge the concentration of carbon dioxide — and alert the choir when too much of their own breath accumulates.</p> <p>These are some of the safety measures the Chorale now takes after the coronavirus visited them in March 2020, when a seemingly ordinary choir practice became one of the country’s first superspreader events. More than 50 members were infected, at least a handful hospitalized. Two died.</p> <p>“We were burned,” member Leigh Giovane said Tuesday evening, before weekly rehearsal had started. The Chorale only recently returned to indoor activities. “Because we had such a devastating experience, we felt we had to be as careful as we could with the lives of our members.”</p> <p>The group’s experience ventilating and filtering indoor air illustrates a new stage of the COVID-19 pandemic that Washington, along with much of the United States, is moving toward after the omicron variant infected vast swaths of the population.</p> <p>State and local health officials say this transition will be a key period to prepare for future health crises. Vaccinations and boosters remain some of the best tools for protecting against severe disease and death, but as public health mandates — like for masking — have ended, experts say some long-term, structural changes will become even more important.</p> <p>Improving indoor air quality is one of those changes. But steep barriers stand in the way, particularly for small businesses and schools, leaving many questions around what steps communities will take.</p> <p>“Indoor air ventilation is extremely important to reduce transmission of the virus,” said Shirlee Tan, a toxicologist for environmental health services at Public Health — Seattle & King County. “There are easy ways to do that, whether you have an HVAC (Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning) system or not. Just opening a window or door and letting in some outdoor air can do a lot.”</p> <p>In Washington state, some air quality standards, set by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, exist for different sectors, but there’s a huge need for new building codes and better statewide ventilation requirements, Tan said.</p> <p>Studies show high-quality air ventilation systems help reduce transmission of airborne diseases, including COVID, by removing particles from indoor air. One study linked improved ventilation strategies in schools to a 48% lower rate of COVID.</p>

Momentum appears to be shifting toward those efforts. The state Department of Health has committed to tackling the issue in its [most recent pandemic plan](#) by listing a number of recommendations, [particularly for schools](#).

President Joe Biden this year also [introduced a nationwide effort to improve ventilation](#) in buildings, calling on schools and organizations to use federal relief — Washington received \$1.8 billion — to adopt key strategies.

“Most of us spend 80% indoors, whether we’re at work or at home, so indoor air quality is really important for health and quality of life,” Tan added. “We’re hoping that becomes a sustainable message.”

Outreach and free filters

On a drizzly weekday in late March, Jenna Truong and Daniel Hwang, both part of King County’s environmental health team, spent the afternoon organizing and distributing free portable air cleaners to local business owners from a warehouse in Kent.

For much of last year, Truong and Hwang joined other public health staffers in reaching out to thousands of King County businesses, community organizations and school districts to explain the importance of better indoor air quality and set them up with portable air cleaners for their buildings.

The outreach is part of larger [county efforts](#) to teach community members about how good indoor ventilation can not only reduce COVID spread, but also increase long-term public health.

“COVID has changed a lot in the last two years, but the principles of good ventilation and how to improve indoor air quality have not changed,” said Marissa Baker, assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at the University of Washington.

Most all spaces can usually either open a window or door, use portable cleaners or bring in fresh air through a ventilation system, though that can be expensive and time-consuming, Baker said.

To date, Public Health — Seattle & King County has provided over 1,500 free evaluations of buildings and their air circulation systems and distributed nearly 2,000 HEPA filters — high-efficiency particulate air filters — to communities more at-risk of COVID spread. HEPA filters can remove 99% of dust, pollen, mold, bacteria and other airborne particles with a diameter as small as 0.3 microns, including particles that contain the coronavirus, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The efforts have helped many businesses facing challenges as they navigate often complex ventilation upgrades.

Outside the Kent warehouse, one local business leader, David Bestock, pulled his car into the parking lot to pick up an order of filters. Bestock, executive director of the Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association, arrived hoping to better clean the air at the organization’s Youngstown Cultural Arts Center.

“So, have you ever used one of these before?” Truong asked him, gesturing to a unit propped up on a table. After months of this work, she’s become an expert at giving a quick how-to on the machines.

In HEPA cleaners, indoor air passes through a series of filters that capture and remove pathogens before releasing clean air into a room. HVAC systems are bigger systems installed in buildings that often bring outdoor air inside, recirculate it and send it through a furnace filter before releasing it into a building.

“These filters are great year-round,” she said. “They help with wildfire smoke (and) they can help if anyone in your office has asthma or allergies, so they’re a really robust tool that isn’t just adding a layer of protection for COVID, but for other things as well.”

Bestock and his co-workers have secured a couple other HEPA cleaners as the Youngstown center slowly reopened to the public — but it's an older building, meaning the options for good air filtration are limited, he said.

"We have HVAC units for two of our main rental spaces, but everything else is just windows and electric fans/heaters, which are on the ceiling and are terrible. ... That's why we need these," he said.

Khadra Mohamed — who runs Saharle Daycare, a small, child care center in Kent — said she was hit with a huge wave of relief when she heard about the county's efforts to give out the cleaners to local organizations.

"I went online weeks ago (looking for an appropriate air purifier) and it was \$600," Mohamed said after picking up two filter systems from the Kent warehouse. "I remember thinking to myself, 'How am I going to afford this?'"

Several of her kids have bad allergies, she said, and while she tries to keep windows and doors open to bring fresh air inside, she needs a better system.

Classroom air

The recent push to improve ventilation systems has perhaps met the most difficult obstacles [within Washington's classrooms](#).

Because of old district buildings, a lack of expertise and limited funds, clean air efforts have been slow-moving, said Tyler Muench, who manages government relations for the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's capital budget.

Refreshing air inside classrooms is among the most important measures schools can take against airborne diseases like COVID-19, in addition to distancing, masking and hand-washing, according to federal health officials and occupational safety experts.

In Washington, public schools have historically funded construction projects through the state's School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP), which distributes funding to districts able to secure local dollars.

The formula for deciding how much funding each district gets, however, is outdated, Muench said.

"Seattle has no problem raising local revenues for construction with its healthy tax base," Muench said. "But go out to the peninsula and you have communities where they haven't passed a bond or levy in 20, 40, 50 years."

As a result, communities that can't raise local funds don't get access to their state share, he said.

For example, the Wahkiakum School District, a rural district in Southwest Washington, is [suing the state](#) for relying on local property taxes to complete school construction, thus exacerbating equity gaps between wealthier and poorer districts, Muench said. The last seven of eight bond measures to help repair Wahkiakum's schools have failed, [KUOW reported](#), leaving students with inadequate science lab facilities, fire systems and earthquake preparedness plans.

For districts like Wahkiakum, environmental health experts recommend letting in as much outdoor air as possible by opening windows or doors, or upping time spent outside.

The state does offer an initiative for smaller, often more rural districts, called the Small District Modernization Program, which provides fully funded repairs to districts unable to participate in the larger construction program. But the small-district program is also underfunded, Muench said.

Because of state barriers to funding, federal pandemic relief dollars have been a “lifeline” for districts the past two years, he said.

[In Seattle](#), public schools have cranked settings in HVAC systems to pump in 100% outside air, versus the typical setting of 30%.

[Highline Public Schools](#) in South King County bought HEPA filters for more than 100 classrooms, primarily those in older buildings without central ventilation systems. The district’s newer schools are equipped with HVAC systems.

[Tacoma Public Schools](#) is working to update its HVAC systems to reach the state’s recommended modifications, which will be funded through bonds and federal aid.

In the [Lake Washington School District](#), each classroom gets about seven air changes per hour, which exceeds DOH’s recommendation of five to six air changes per hour. The district has also upgraded its systems to use a MERV-13 filter, which offers a high grade of filtration.

More can be done, though, particularly in parts of the state that can’t afford new ventilation systems, said Tan, the King County toxicologist.

“Investing in the HEPA air cleaners is a great way to supplement and address urgent needs during COVID,” she said, “but for a long-term sustainable change so that kids have good air in their schools, HVAC upgrades are going to be important.”

Joy returns amid trauma’s sting

At Salem Lutheran, the sun is starting to set as the Chorale wraps up practice. The next rehearsal will be at McIntyre Hall, a performance theater down the street, in preparation for this weekend, when the Chorale will host its first in-person concert since the outbreak.

It’s a beautiful venue, members say, though that’s no longer all they look for in a performance space. McIntyre has a high-quality HVAC system, and also requires masks and proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID test.

Homemade air cleaners aren’t a perfect solution, Chorale director Adam Burdick acknowledged, but as long as members layer protections they should be safe, Skagit Regional Health officials told the group.

“We are just so elated to be singing together again,” Chorale president Ruth Backlund said. Joy is returning even though it’s hard to shake some anxiety and sadness.

Backlund misses former members, some who were so haunted they left the Chorale, unsure if they could sing in a group again, and others who chose not to follow the vaccination requirement.

Rehearsal is over, and as members clean up and get ready to leave, they pass a stack of posters advertising the upcoming concert with a familiar springtime theme: “Celebrating in Song.”

This year, the sentiment resonates more than ever.

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HEADLINE	05/02 South Africa latest surge a preview?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/south-africas-latest-surge-is-a-possible-preview-of-pandemics-next-chapter/
GIST	Coronavirus cases are surging again in South Africa, and public health experts are monitoring the situation, eager to know what’s driving the spike, what it says about immunity from previous infections and what its implications are globally.

South Africa experienced a decline in cases after hitting an Omicron-fueled, pandemic peak in December. But in the past week, [cases have tripled](#), positivity rates are up and hospitalizations have also increased, health officials said. The surge has the country facing a possible fifth wave.

The spike is linked to BA.4 And BA.5, two subvariants that are [part of the Omicron family](#).

Tulio de Oliveira, director of South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal Research and Innovation Sequencing Platform, said that BA.4 and BA.5 [demonstrate](#) how the virus is evolving differently as global immunity increases.

"What we are seeing now, or at least maybe the first signs, is not completely new variants emerging, but current variants are starting to create lineages of themselves," Dr. de Oliveira said. Since its initial identification in South Africa and Botswana last November, Omicron has produced several subvariants.

Some scientists are trying to understand what the BA.4 and BA.5 spike in South Africa, which is concentrated mainly in the Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, says about immunity from previous Omicron infections. The highly contagious Omicron variant first appeared in South Africa late last year, then quickly spread globally.

In South Africa, researchers estimate about 90 percent of the population has some immunity, in part from inoculation but largely because of previous infection. Yet immunity from infection typically begins to wane at around three months. It's natural to see re-infection at this stage, particularly given people's changing behaviors, like less mask-wearing and traveling more, said Dr. Ali Mokdad, an epidemiologist at the University of Washington, and formerly of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Emerging data show that in unvaccinated people, BA.4 and BA.5 evades natural defenses produced from an infection with the original Omicron variant, known as BA.1, which sent [case counts skyrocketing](#) in South Africa last winter, Dr. de Oliveira said. The result is symptomatic infections with the new subvariants.

"That is the reason why it is starting to fuel a wave in South Africa," Dr. de Oliveira said.

Scientists are still studying whether this new wave creates milder or more severe illness, and it is unclear if the two subvariants could surge elsewhere in the world.

"We're at an awkward global moment where the past can't really predict the future," said Dr. Kavita Patel, a primary care physician who led the pandemic preparedness response for the H1N1 swine flu virus during the Obama administration.

The familiar patterns — a wave in one country means another wave elsewhere — no longer necessarily work like clockwork, Dr. Patel said. But monitoring situations and data coming out of countries like South Africa offers reliable signals to understanding the virus's evolution.

Currently, another Omicron subvariant, BA.2, is dominant in the United States, with BA.2.12.1 gaining speed as well although public health officials have identified BA.4 and BA.5 circulating at low levels.

Whatever the dominant variant, "the lesson here is stopping transmission is the most important," said Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding, an epidemiologist who is the chief of the Covid-19 task force at the World Health Network.

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HEADLINE	05/03 US weapons stockpiles under strain
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-biden-business-eastern-europe-dover-35586737ec1923b1477d26bc45eeb7ed

WASHINGTON (AP) — The planes take off almost daily from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware — hulking C-17s loaded up with Javelins, Stingers, howitzers and other material being hustled to Eastern Europe to resupply [Ukraine's military in its fight against Russia](#).

The game-changing impact of those arms is exactly what President Joe Biden hopes to spotlight as he visits a Lockheed Martin plant in Alabama on Tuesday that builds the portable Javelin anti-tank weapons that have played a crucial role in Ukraine.

But Biden's visit is also drawing attention to a growing concern as the war drags on: Can the U.S. sustain the cadence of shipping vast amounts of arms to Ukraine while maintaining the healthy stockpile it may need if a new conflict erupts with North Korea, Iran or elsewhere?

The U.S. already has provided about 7,000 Javelins, including some that were delivered during the Trump administration, about one-third of its stockpile, to Ukraine, according to an analysis by Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Center for Strategic and International Studies international security program. The Biden administration says it has committed to sending about 5,500 to Ukraine since the Russian invasion more than two months ago.

Analysts also estimate that the United States has sent about one-quarter of its stockpile of shoulder-fired Stinger missiles to Ukraine. Raytheon Technologies CEO Greg Hayes told investors last week during a quarterly call that his company, which makes the weapons system, wouldn't be able to ramp up production until next year due to parts shortages.

"Could this be a problem? The short answer is, 'Probably, yes,'" said Cancian, a retired Marine colonel and former government specialist on Pentagon budget strategy, war funding and procurement.

He said that Stingers and Javelins were where "we're seeing the most significant inventory issues," and production of both weapons systems has been limited in recent years.

The Russian invasion offers the U.S. and European defense industry a big opportunity to bolster profits as lawmakers from Washington to Warsaw are primed to increase defense spending in response to Russian aggression. Defense contractors, however, face the same supply chain and labor shortage challenges that other manufacturers are facing, along with some others that are specific to the industry.

Military spending by the U.S. and around the world was rising even before Russia's Feb. 24 invasion. Biden's proposed 2023 budget sought \$773 billion for the Pentagon, an annual increase of about 4%.

Globally, total military spending rose 0.7% to more than \$2 trillion for the first time in 2021, according to an April report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Russia ranked fifth, as its spending on weapons increased ahead of its invasion of Ukraine.

The war will mean increased sales for some defense contractors, including Raytheon, which makes the Stinger missiles Ukrainian troops have used to knock out Russian aircraft. The company is also part of a joint venture with Lockheed Martin that makes the Javelins.

Biden will visit Lockheed Martin's facility in Troy, Ala., which has the capacity to manufacture about 2,100 Javelins per year. The trip comes as he presses Congress to quickly approve his request for an additional \$33 billion in security and economic assistance for Kyiv, Western allies and restocking weapons the U.S. has sent to those countries.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Monday he hoped quick bipartisan agreement on the security package could be reached so the Senate could begin considering it "as early as next week."

The president is expected to use his remarks to highlight the importance of the Javelins and other U.S. weaponry in helping Ukraine's military put up a vigorous fight as he makes the case to keep security and economic assistance flowing.

A White House official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity, said the Pentagon is working with defense contractors “to evaluate the health of weapons systems’ production lines and examine bottlenecks in every component and step of the manufacturing process.” The administration is also considering a range of options, if needed, to boost production of both Javelins and Stingers, the official said.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said Monday that America’s military readiness is not dependent on one system, such as the Javelin. He said that every time the Pentagon develops a package of weapons to send to Ukraine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the department assesses the broader impact.

“It’s not about counting say Javelins and being able to say that when you reach a certain level then all your readiness is gone,” Kirby said. “The Javelin is an anti-armor capability, so we judge it all as a conglomerate of what’s our ability to meet this particular mission set, realizing that a Javelin isn’t the only capability you have against armor.”

Cancian, the former government specialist on defense budget strategy, said the fact that Stingers and Javelins were not included in the most recent tranche of weapons the Biden administration announced it was sending to Ukraine could be a sign that Pentagon officials are mindful about inventory as they conduct contingency planning for other possible conflicts.

“There’s no question that whatever war plan they’re looking at there is risk associated with the depleting levels of Stingers and Javelins, and I’m sure that they’re having that discussion at the Pentagon,” he said.

The U.S. military effort to move weaponry to Eastern Europe for Ukraine’s fight has been Herculean. From Dover Air Base in Delaware, U.S. airmen have carried out nearly 70 missions to deliver some 7 million pounds of Javelins, Stingers, 155mm howitzers, helmets and other essentials to Eastern Europe since February. Col. Matt Husemann, commander of the 436th Airlift Wing, described the mission as a “whole of government approach that’s delivering hope.”

“It is awesome,” said Husemann, after providing AP with a recent tour of the airlift operation.

The lightweight but lethal Javelin has helped the Ukrainians inflict major damage on Russia’s larger and better-equipped military. As a result, the weapon has gained almost mythic regard, celebrated with a Javelin song and images of Mary Magdalene carrying a Javelin becoming a meme in Ukraine.

Lockheed Martin CEO James Taiclet said in a recent CNBC interview that demand for the Javelin and other weapon systems would increase broadly over time because of the Russian invasion. He said the company was working “to get our supply chain ramped up.”

“We have the ability to meet current production demands, are investing in increased capacity and are exploring ways to further increase production as needed,” Lockheed Martin said in a statement.

Pentagon officials recently sat down with some of the leading defense contractors, including Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Boeing, General Dynamics, BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman to discuss efforts to ramp up production.

The big defense contractors face some serious challenges.

Raytheon, for example, can’t simply crank out Stingers to replace the 1,400 that the U.S. sent to Ukraine. Hayes, the Raytheon CEO, said in a recent conference call with analysts that the company has only limited supplies of components to make the missile. Only one undisclosed country has been buying them in recent years, and the Pentagon hasn’t bought any new ones in nearly 20 years.

Sanctions further complicate the picture. Companies must find new sources of important raw materials such as titanium, a crucial component in aerospace manufacturing that is produced in Russia.

	<p>Concerns about the Stinger stockpile have been raised by House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., and the top Republican on the committee, Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama. The two in March wrote to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley, describing the stockpile issue as one of “urgency.”</p> <p>Rogers said he remains concerned that the matter hasn’t been properly addressed.</p> <p>“I’ve been asking the DoD for almost two months for a plan to replenish our Stinger stockpile as well as our Javelin launch units,” Rogers said. “I worry that without a readily available replacement or fully active production lines, we could leave Ukraine and our NATO allies in a vulnerable position.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 China preparing to invade Taiwan?
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10774819/Beijing-looks-save-3-2tn-foreign-reserves-sanctions-event-military-conflict.html
GIST	<p>Chinese officials are looking at ways to defend the country from economic attack if the West should look to sanction China in the same way it did Russia — stoking fears the nation is preparing for an invasion of Taiwan.</p> <p>China's regulators held an emergency meeting on April 22 between officials from China’s central bank, the finance ministry, domestic banks operating within China, and international lenders such as HSBC.</p> <p>The West's harsh economic sanctions on Russia prompted the emergency meeting, with the Ministry of Finance stating that President Xi’s administration had been put on alert by the surprise dollar freeze.</p> <p>The news comes as the UK and the US held top level talks on how to manage a crisis in Asia, should China invade Taiwan.</p> <p>China claims Taiwan as part of its territory despite the island nation functioning under a separate government since 1949.</p> <p>The US is thought to be considering proportionate sanctions on China in the event it invades Taiwan, envisioning a similar scenario to the one playing out in Ukraine.</p> <p>'No one on site could think of a good solution to the problem,' the Financial Times quoted a source as saying. 'China’s banking system isn’t prepared for a freeze of its dollar assets or exclusion from the Swift messaging system as the US has done to Russia.'</p> <p>China is looking to expand the amount renminbi in circulation relative to its US-dollar holdings.</p> <p>One idea was to force exporting Chinese businesses to ditch their dollar holdings in exchange for renminbi.</p> <p>Another suggestion was to cut to the \$50,000 quota that Chinese nationals are allowed to purchase every year for overseas travel, education and other offshore purchases.</p> <p>Other potential solutions such as swamping some US dollar holdings for Euros were not thought to be practical, but some doubted the US would have the capacity to sanction China — the world's seconded largest economy — in the same way it did Russia.</p> <p>'It is difficult for the US to impose massive sanctions against China,' said Andrew Collier, managing director of Orient Capital Research in Hong Kong. 'It is like mutually assured destruction in a nuclear war.'</p>

	<p>Although Chinese businesses have refrained from overtly doing business with Vladimir Putin's regime since he gave the order to invade Ukraine, President Xi Jinping has reportedly retained some economic ties with Russia.</p> <p>Kurt Campbell, the White House Indo-Pacific co-ordinator, and Laura Rosenberger, the top National Security Council China official, held a meeting on Taiwan with UK representatives in early March.</p> <p>The US is looking to boost cooperation with European allies, as well as engaging with Japan and Australia after Beijing stepped up military activity.</p> <p>China continually violates Taiwanese airspace, escalating deployments over the past year.</p> <p>'Deterring Chinese aggression against Taiwan is in everyone's interest. It is not just an Indo-Pacific issue, it is a global issue,' said Heino Klinck, a former top Pentagon Asia official. 'US military planners are not counting on Germany or France sending warships, or Britain sending a carrier in the case of a conflict over Taiwan.</p> <p>'But when those countries send ships to the South China Sea, or transit the Taiwan Strait, it sends a strong signal to China.'</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Most have now had Covid; next?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/02/politics/covid-vaccine-booster-pandemic-surge-what-matters/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)While it's tempting to say much of life is getting back to normal, it's probably more accurate to say it feels more comfortable and normal living alongside Covid-19.</p> <p>For many of those who are vaccinated or were previously infected, learning of a close contact with the disease is less frightening than frustrating.</p> <p>Testing is more and more normal. Masks are less and less visible.</p> <p>Kids in the US who are between 6 months and 5 years old could be eligible for vaccines by June, a huge relief to many parents. Many others might not get their small children vaccinated. Just over a third of children ages 5-11 are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>In the next few weeks, the US is likely to record its 1 millionth reported Covid-19 death, a number that is so staggering it seems unbelievable.</p> <p>There is an uptick in cases in the US and hospitalizations are up 10% since last week. Hopefully the rate of deaths continues to fall.</p> <p>Most Americans have had Covid-19</p> <p>According to data through February released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 60% of adults and 75% of children have antibodies indicating that they've been infected with Covid-19.</p> <p>The data comes from an ongoing study of blood samples sent to commercial laboratories across the US. At the beginning of December, an estimated 34% of Americans had antibodies, which suggests the Omicron variant infected a quarter of the population.</p> <p>We can assume Covid-19 will surge back</p> <p>The warning from Dr. Deborah Birx -- the White House Coronavirus Response Task Force coordinator during the Trump era, who is out with a new book -- is that we can expect surges in cases in the South in the summer and in the North in the winter.</p>

During an appearance on CBS News on Sunday, Birx pointed to a new rise in Covid-19 cases in South Africa.

"Each of these surges are about four to six months apart. That tells me that natural immunity wanes enough in the general population after four to six months -- that a significant surge is going to occur again," Birx said.

Public health officials need to prepare the public, she said, and make sure everyone knows that immunity, from infection or vaccination, wanes over time.

You have to go beyond 'fully vaccinated' to be 'up to date'

Even as public health officials push most people to get booster shots months after vaccination, they have not updated the definition of "fully vaccinated" to include a booster.

While more than three-quarters of the country has received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, less than one-third has received a booster.

For this reason, officials have moved away from that term -- "fully vaccinated" -- and instead encourage people to stay "up to date," which means getting a booster when eligible.

According to the [CDC's data](#), these are the vaccination numbers:

- 77.6% of Americans have received at least one dose -- nearly 258 million people.
- 66.2% have received the second dose and are considered "fully vaccinated" according to the CDC.
- 45.8% of those who are fully vaccinated have received their first booster doses. (Per CNN's metrics, a much smaller percentage -- about 30% -- of the total population has received a booster.)

More boosters may be required. In March, the CDC [authorized a second booster dose](#) of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for people over 50 who are four months past their first booster doses.

The most durable immunity comes for people who are up to date on their vaccines and have been previously infected.

Many doctors still say to stay up to date on vaccines as they are authorized by the US Food and Drug Administration.

"We still need to push forward getting those vaccines done to give the highest level of protection we possibly can," Dr. Anand Swaminathan, an emergency medicine physician, said on CNN over the weekend.

He argued that we still don't know a lot about the disease and that cases of long Covid are worth trying to avoid.

What exactly is long Covid?

A [must-read new CNN report](#) by Jacqueline Howard looks at Linda Timmer, 64, who didn't display any traditional Covid-19 symptoms and was not aware of having been exposed to the coronavirus when she tested positive in August 2020.

Her case of long Covid pushed her into an early retirement and to move closer to family -- and 20 months later, she still has debilitating symptoms.

Howard also talked to Nick Guthe, whose wife, Heidi Ferrer, died by suicide after long Covid made life excruciating.

It's misunderstood and hard to diagnose, but symptoms can drag on for months.

Transitioning to what?

Many states are [dialing back their Covid-19 data tracking efforts](#) from daily to weekly reports, CNN's Deidre McPhillips wrote last week, which could affect how public health officials are able to gauge and predict outbreaks.

In the same report, McPhillips noted the US is transitioning from the pandemic phase of the Covid-19 era, but there's disagreement on what the US is transitioning to.

She wrote: *The rise of the BA.2 subvariant and the general unpredictability of the coronavirus leave the future of the pandemic -- and the resources needed to fight it -- largely unknown.*

"Things are not stable right now," said William Hanage, an epidemiologist and associate professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "Even if I don't reckon we are going to see [another] large surge, weekly reporting means that if I am wrong, we would learn about it later and so be able to do less about it."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, had to [recalibrate comments he had made last week](#) when he said the US is nearly out of the pandemic.

"We're not over the pandemic. Don't let anybody get the misinterpretation that the pandemic is over, but what we are in is a different phase of the pandemic," Fauci said. "A phase that's a transition phase, hopefully headed toward more of a control where you can actually get back to some form of normality without total disruption of society, economically, socially, school-wise, etc."

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HEADLINE	05/03 Putin to officially declare war on Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/03/europe/russia-ukraine-declaration-of-war-intl-hnk-ml/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Russian President Vladimir Putin could formally declare war on Ukraine as soon as May 9, a move that would enable the full mobilization of Russia's reserve forces as invasion efforts continue to falter, US and Western officials believe.</p> <p>May 9, known as "Victory Day" inside of Russia, commemorates the country's defeat of the Nazis in 1945. Western officials have long believed that Putin would leverage the symbolic significance and propaganda value of that day to announce either a military achievement in Ukraine, a major escalation of hostilities -- or both.</p> <p>Officials have begun to hone in on one scenario, which is that Putin formally declares war on Ukraine on May 9. To date, Putin has insisted on referring to the brutal monthslong conflict as a "special military operation," effectively banning words such as invasion and war.</p> <p>"I think he will try to move from his 'special operation,'" British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace told LBC Radio last week. "He's been rolling the pitch, laying the ground for being able to say 'look, this is now a war against Nazis, and what I need is more people. I need more Russian cannon fodder.'"</p> <p>Throughout the conflict Putin has continuously framed his invasion of Ukraine -- a country with a Jewish president -- as a campaign of supposed "denazification," a description dismissed by historians and political observers alike.</p> <p>Wallace added that he "would not be surprised, and I don't have any information about this, that he is probably going to declare on this May Day that 'we are now at war with the world's Nazis and we need to mass mobilize the Russian people.'"</p> <p>A formal declaration of war on May 9 could potentially bolster public support for the invasion. It would also, under Russian law, allow Putin to mobilize reserve forces and draft conscripts, which officials say Russia desperately needs amid a growing manpower shortage. Western and Ukrainian officials have</p>

estimated that at least 10,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in the war since Russia invaded just over two months ago.

Russian battlefield effort 'anemic'

Following a series of military and logistical setbacks, Moscow has concentrated efforts on [the Donbas region](#) of eastern Ukraine, which has been on the frontline of the Russia-Ukraine conflict since 2014. But the US official on Monday described the Russian war effort there as "anemic."

"They'll move in and then declare victory, and then withdraw their troops, only to let the Ukrainians take it back," the official told reporters at a Pentagon briefing.

The official said problems that have plagued the Russian military since their initial surge have not been fixed.

"They're still suffering from poor command-and-control, low morale in many units, [less-than-ideal logistics](#)," the official said.

Russian forces were also keen to avoid risks that could lead to further casualties to their already depleted forces, the official said, describing the ground war in the area as "very cautious, very tepid."

Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces were making significant progress in pushing the Russians back around Kharkiv, at the northwestern tip of the Donbas region, the official said.

"An incredible effort there that, again, hasn't gotten a lot of headlines and hasn't gotten a lot of attention, but it's just another piece of the stiff Ukrainian resistance that they continue to demonstrate," the official said.

Putin's other May 9 options

With less than a week to go before the May 9 Victory Day, Moscow may look at places other than Donbas to make a statement.

Other options include annexing the breakaway territories of Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, making a major push for Odesa in the south, or declaring full control over the southern port city of Mariupol.

The US has "highly credible" intelligence reports that Russia will try to annex Luhansk and Donetsk "some time in mid-May," the US Ambassador to OSCE Michael Carpenter said on Monday. There are also indications that Russia could be planning to declare and annex a "people's republic" in the southeastern city of Kherson.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday there is "good reason to believe that the Russians will do everything they can to use" May 9 for propaganda purposes.

"We've seen the Russians really double down on their propaganda efforts, probably, almost certainly, as a means to distract from their tactical and strategic failures on the battlefield in Ukraine," Price said at a State Department briefing.

Price added that it "would be a great irony if Moscow used the occasion of 'Victory Day' to declare war, which in itself would allow them to surge conscripts in a way they're not able to do now, in a way that would be tantamount to revealing to the world that their war effort is failing, that they are floundering in their military campaign and military objectives."

"I'm quite confident that we'll be hearing more from Moscow in the lead up to May 9," Price added. "I'm quite confident that you will be hearing more from the United States, from our partners, including our NATO partners, in the lead up to May 9 as well."

HEADLINE	05/03 Experts dire warning on inflation
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/media/inflation-nation-experts-rising-prices-here-to-stay
GIST	<p>Experts and investors warned inflation is likely to plague the United States for years to come, despite reassurance from President Biden and Fed Chairman Jerome Powell that it is transitory, or on track to decline in the next year.</p> <p>Powell said in March he expects inflation to remain high through the middle of the year, but to "come down more sharply" next year.</p> <p>Over the last year, this sentiment was echoed by members of the media, who downplayed the effects inflation was having on Americans.</p> <p>In November, MSNBC's Stephanie Ruhle downplayed the inflation issue, saying while "nobody likes to play more," "on average, we have the money to do so." Another MSNBC host, Mehdi Hasan, criticized the "inflation obsessive" that month for their opposition to the sprawling Build Back Better program that he claimed would lower it.</p> <p>In December, New York Times columnist Paul Krugman admitted he had been on "Team Transitory" and thus far had been proven wrong, writing, "Mainstream economists are currently divided between what are now widely called Team Transitory and Team Persistent. Team Transitory, myself included, has argued that we're looking at a temporary blip — although longer lasting than we first expected. Others, however, warn that we may face something comparable to the stagflation of the 1970s. And credit where credit is due: So far, warnings about inflation have proved right, while Team Transitory's predictions that inflation would quickly fade have been wrong."</p> <p>Four months later, Krugman admitted in another column that even though a temporary improvement was in the offing, inflation was a problem that wasn't going away soon.</p> <p>The notion that inflation is merely transitory doesn't appear to be part of a broad media narrative anymore, as persistently high prices have gripped the United States for months.</p> <p>President Biden, press secretary Jen Psaki, and U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen all suggested last year that inflation would be temporary.</p> <p>Now, it's such a part of American life, it's fodder for humor. Biden was spotted laughing Saturday at the White House Correspondents Dinner when comic Trevor Noah joked that he didn't get why the president got so much criticism, since under him everything is "up."</p> <p>"You know, I think ever since you've come into office, things are really looking up. Gas is up. Rent is up. Food is up. Everything," Noah said.</p> <p>Biden laughed this time, but it's previously been a sore spot. Asked by Fox News' Peter Doocy in January if inflation would be a political liability ahead of the 2022 midterms, Biden muttered sarcastically it would be a "great asset," before adding, "What a stupid son of a b---h."</p> <p>Billionaire investor David Rubenstein; however, said that Americans should be worried about inflation.</p> <p>"Inflation, as we all know, when it gets in the system, it's very hard to get it out. It takes a long time to get it out, can take a couple of years," Rubenstein told Fox News Digital at The Milken Institute's 2022 Global Conference.</p> <p>"So now I don't think the inflation rate this year will be what it was last month or so. I don't think we're going to have 8% annualized rate of inflation, but I suspect something around 5% is probably not unlikely, maybe even 6%," he added.</p>

	<p>The Milken Institute chief economist Bill Lee predicted inflation would be "well over 3.5%" for the next five years, after which he said it would begin to wane.</p> <p>This could have drastic implications for Americans across the country.</p> <p>"One of the things that we've seen is that inflation has, you know, very direct impacts on Americans, on American families and American businesses," Director of the Congressional Budget Office Phillip Swagel told Fox News Digital. "It also has implications for the implications for the budget. For American families, the high inflation that we've seen the highest in decades has meant higher prices for food, for travel, for gasoline. It means that family incomes don't go as far. Family budgets are stretched."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 CIA seeks Russians opposed Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cia-russians-oppose-ukraine-war/
GIST	<p>The CIA is offering Russians opposed to the war in Ukraine a secure way to contact the agency amid concerns for their safety, as the Russian government continues a crackdown on outside information and opposition to the Kremlin's months-long invasion.</p> <p>"We are providing Russian-language instructions on how to safely contact CIA — via our Dark Web site or a reputable VPN — for those who feel compelled to reach us because of the Russian Government's unjust war," a CIA official told CBS News. "Our global mission demands that individuals can contact us securely from anywhere."</p> <p>The agency on Monday released text-only instructions in Russian on several of its social media channels, including YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, for accessing its dark web site — which has shown value in securely eliciting information from individuals all over the world since it was first launched in 2019.</p> <p>Accessing the site requires a browser called Tor, or "the onion router," which protects a user's identity by encrypting their web traffic. The CIA hopes it will help concerned citizens in Russia — as well as Russian soldiers in Ukraine — safely contact the agency with information.</p> <p>Western assessments have routinely indicated that Russia's military forces in Ukraine are suffering from low morale, with occasional reports of soldiers refusing to carry out orders or sabotaging their own equipment.</p> <p>And while opinion polls in Russia suggest — amid a narrative tightly controlled by the Kremlin — that there is widespread public support for the Kremlin's invasion, U.S. officials are also closely tracking potential fissures among Russian elites, some of whom have seen their fortunes erased by punishing sanctions and have publicly voiced opposition to the war.</p> <p>Both Facebook and Instagram have been banned in Russia since the start of the invasion, though individuals have found workarounds to access censored sites with the use of premium, paid VPNs. Recent reports indicate demand for VPNs in Russia has skyrocketed since the Kremlin instituted the ban.</p> <p>A CIA spokesperson declined to comment on the volume of engagement it had seen from Russia via its dark web site, or how its analysts vetted identities or information once contact was made.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Bombshell leak: Supreme Court decision
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/supreme-court-draft-decision-would-strike-down-roe-v-wade?ref=home
GIST	<p>A draft opinion obtained by Politico shows that the conservative majority of the Supreme Court is moving toward striking down Roe v. Wade, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision that established the legal right to an abortion.</p>

“*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start,” Justice Samuel Alito writes in the 98-page draft labeled “Opinion of the Court.”

“We hold that *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled,” Alito continues. “It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.”

While Politico is careful to note this is simply a draft decision—the Supreme Court isn’t expected to decide abortion rights for another couple of months—the decision as currently written is a full repudiation of abortion rights. It would rule that Mississippi has the right to [ban abortion after 15 weeks](#).

But the draft decision itself goes far beyond just upholding the Mississippi law; it would completely overturn the most essential abortion rights established in *Roe* and later affirmed in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

The draft decision says “the right to abortion” does not fall within the rights to liberty, and if affirmed by the court, it would immediately throw the nation’s abortion laws into chaos.

There are already 13 states that have so-called trigger laws that would automatically ban abortion once the Supreme Court strikes down *Roe*: Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming.

On top of those 13, many other GOP-controlled states are likely to introduce new restrictions to abortion—if not completely outlaw the practice.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem tweeted late Monday that if the court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, she “will immediately call for a special session to save lives and guarantee that every unborn child has a right to life in South Dakota.”

The draft decision rails against abortion in no uncertain terms.

“The inescapable conclusion is that a right to abortion is not deeply rooted in the Nation’s history and traditions,” Alito writes in the draft. “On the contrary, an unbroken tradition of prohibiting abortion on pain of criminal punishment persisted from the earliest days of the common law until 1973.”

“We do not pretend to know how our political system or society will respond to today’s decision overruling *Roe* and *Casey*,” the decision goes on to say. “And even if we could foresee what will happen, we would have no authority to let that knowledge influence our decision. We can only do our job, which is to interpret the law, apply longstanding principles of *stare decisis*, and decide this case accordingly. We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled, and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives.”

The leaking of the decision—itself a newsworthy and unprecedented action for the notoriously secretive Supreme Court—is sure to have an immediate effect in Washington. Democrats have long argued for national laws protecting abortion rights. Republicans have long argued that states should be free to make their own laws, mostly hoping states would ban or greatly restrict the practice.

But one thing seemed clear Monday night: Whoever leaked the draft decision intended to influence the private deliberations.

As the Supreme Court continues to consider the draft opinion, its mere existence has instantly thrown what was once reflexively referred to as “settled law” into an open question.

Among the five justices who appear to have signed on to the draft decision—Alito, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and [Amy Coney Barrett](#)—all five were appointed by Republicans. Three were appointed by Donald Trump.

Chief Justice John Roberts, who was appointed by Republican George W. Bush, had not signed on to the initial draft decision, but as Politico notes, he may ultimately side with the majority. Sources told [CNN](#) that Roberts was willing to uphold the Mississippi law before the court, but he was not willing to completely overturn *Roe*, lending further credibility to the draft opinion.

While the veracity of the draft was the major immediate question, the political fallout of the impending decision, as well as what lawmakers could do to protect abortion rights, may loom even larger.

A number of GOP lawmakers who claim to support abortion rights voted for Trump's Supreme Court picks seemingly under the assumption that those justices would not strike down abortion.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) [famously said](#) she would not support a nominee who demonstrated "hostility" toward *Roe*, let alone outright opposition.

But Collins voted for Gorsuch, who got his seat after Republicans went "[nuclear](#)" in the Senate to allow Supreme Court nominees to only garner a simple majority. She voted for Kavanaugh, who faced [allegations of sexual assault](#). And she voted for Barrett, who only got her seat after [Ruth Bader Ginsburg died](#) late in the election season, when the [Senate typically waits for voters to weigh in](#).

Although it was too early Monday night to know exactly what effect the draft decision would have on the midterm elections, a 6-3 Republican-appointed Supreme Court overturning *Roe* could upend conventional wisdom about the strong advantage the GOP holds in the November elections.

Even more concerning for the GOP's political prospects, if the draft decision does become real in the coming months, Republicans could face a significant backlash from voters who believed the right to an abortion was, in fact, settled. And while some Republicans may want to join Democrats in passing legislation to protect the right to an abortion, any such bill would face stiff opposition in the Senate, where there is still a 60-vote threshold for passage.

The House passed a bill in September—called the Women's Health Protection Act—that would have codified *Roe* into national law. But the legislation failed to pass in the Senate. Sen. [Bernie Sanders](#) (I-VT) and Sen. [Tammy Baldwin](#) (D-WI) tweeted Monday that the Senate should pass the bill—and eliminate the filibuster if it could not garner the requisite 60 votes.

Meanwhile, Alexis McGill Johnson, the president of Planned Parenthood, [tweeted](#) that the organization had been "preparing for every possible outcome in this case."

"Our health centers remain open and make no mistake, we're fighting like hell," she said.

Renee Bracey Sherman, a prominent activist and the founder the pro-abortion nonprofit We Testify, told The Daily Beast on Monday night that abortion remains legal in all 50 states as of now, but this emergency was "for real."

"This is not a drill," she said. "And we need Congress to show up. We need the president to show up. We have been warning about this for a decade and they have treated us like ****ing Chicken Little."

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HEADLINE	05/02 Calif. population fell again amid pandemic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/californias-population-fell-amid-pandemics-2nd-year-84448578
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- The nation's most populous state is shrinking.</p> <p>California's population declined again in 2021 for the second consecutive year, state officials said Monday, the result of a slowdown in births and immigration coupled with an increase in deaths and people leaving the state.</p>

With an estimated 39,185,605 residents, California is still the U.S.'s most populous state, putting it far ahead of second-place Texas and its 29.5 million residents. But after years of strong growth brought California tantalizingly close to the 40 million milestone, the state's population is now roughly back to where it was in 2016 after declining by 117,552 people this year.

California's population growth had been slowing even before the pandemic as baby boomers' aged, younger generations were having fewer children and more people were moving to other states. But the state's natural growth — more births than deaths — and its robust international immigration had been more than enough to offset those losses.

That changed in 2020, when the pandemic killed tens of thousands of people above what would be expected from natural causes, a category demographers refer to as “excess deaths.” And it prompted a sharp decline in international immigration because of travel restrictions and limited visas from the federal government.

California's population fell for the first time that year. At the time, state officials thought it was an outlier, the result of a pandemic that turned the world upside down. But the new estimate released Monday by the California Department of Finance showed the trend continued in 2021, although the decline was less than it had been in 2020.

State officials pointed specifically to losses in international immigration. California gained 43,300 residents from other countries in 2021. But that was well below the annual average of 140,000 that was common before the pandemic.

Walter Schwarm, California's chief demographer, said he wasn't surprised by the decline because “It takes awhile for the machinery of government and others to get back to normal.”

“I think we will be looking at positive growth when we talk about the year 2022,” he said.

Critics point to the steady stream of people leaving California as an indictment on the state's policies, which are set by Democrats in the governor's office and the state Legislature. About 280,000 more people left California for other states than moved here in 2021, continuing a decades-long trend.

“It's not because we no longer have good weather,” quipped Republican Assemblymember Kevin Kiley, who is running for Congress this year after failing to unseat Gov. Gavin Newsom in last year's recall election.

That problem is not easily fixed. California has been losing population to other states for 30 years, said Eric McGhee, a senior at the Public Policy Institute of California, a nonpartisan think tank. It's one reason why he thinks California is “in a period of stagnation for the foreseeable future.”

“California is one of the biggest losers in that calculation. It's hard to see that changing significantly,” he said. “It says something about how hard it is for people to afford living here.”

Impacts of the decline have already been felt, as California lost a seat in Congress for the first time after the U.S. Census showed it did not grow as fast as other states. But the decline hasn't impacted the state's bottom line. California had a record budget surplus last year, and is in line for an even larger one this year of as much as \$68 billion — mostly the result of a progressive tax structure and a disproportionate population of billionaires.

That wealth has made it harder for some to live in California, where the median price of an existing single-family home hit a record high of \$849,080 in March — a 2.6% increase over the previous record set in August. That's forcing people to flee the picturesque population centers of the coast for the relatively cheaper havens of the Inland Empire and the vast Central Valley.

	<p>All but three of California's coastal counties lost population in 2021 — including the Southern California behemoths of Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego — while most inland counties saw steady growth.</p> <p>“The migration is a manifestation of a lot of the problems that people face,” said Wayne Winegarden, a senior fellow with the Pacific Research Institute. “It represents an economic kind of stagnation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 India heatwave sparks blackouts, questions
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/heat-wave-sparks-blackouts-questions-indias-coal-usage-84461985
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- An unusually early and brutal heat wave is scorching parts of India, with acute power shortages affecting millions as demand for electricity surges to record levels.</p> <p>Supplies of coal at many thermal power plants are running perilously low, spawning daily power outages in several states. The shortages are sparking scrutiny of India's long reliance on coal, which produces 70% of the country's electricity.</p> <p>The situation highlights India's pressing need to diversify its energy sources, as demand for electricity is expected to increase more than anywhere else in the world over the next 20 years as the densely populated country develops, according to the International Energy Agency.</p> <p>The shortages hit as blisteringly high temperatures are sweeping over parts of the country, prompting authorities to close schools, sparking fires at gigantic landfills and shriveling crops as a cool spring turned suddenly into unrelenting heat.</p> <p>India recorded its hottest March since 1901, and average temperatures in April in northern and central pockets of the country were the highest in 122 years, the Indian Meteorological Department said. Temperatures breached 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) in 10 cities last week, although cloudy skies and rain could bring some relief soon.</p> <p>Climate change is making severe temperatures hotter and more frequent, with heat waves likely to strike India about once every four years instead of every five decades in the past, said Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at Imperial College London. India urgently needs to prepare for record increases in power consumption as a result.</p> <p>Current power cuts are hurting economic activity, which had been rebounding after pandemic shutdowns, and could disrupt essential services such as hospitals, experts warn. Many states including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan are experiencing blackouts of up to seven hours.</p> <p>On Friday, the railways ministry canceled more than 750 passenger train services to allow more freight trains to move coal from mines to the power plants.</p> <p>Out of India's 165 coal plants, 94 are facing critically low coal supplies while 8 are not operational as of Sunday, according to data from the Central Electricity Authority. This means stocks have dropped below 25% of normal levels.</p> <p>Government rules mandate that power plants maintain 24 days' worth of coal stocks, but many routinely don't, said Vibhuti Garg, an energy economist at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.</p> <p>Much of India had a cool spring this year before temperatures rose quickly and dramatically. “Then suddenly the demand started picking up and the inventories started declining much, much faster than anticipated,” Garg said. “And this becomes a kind of panic situation that they'll start running out of coal pretty soon.”</p>

But the power outages are less the result of a dearth of coal than inadequate forecasts of demand and plans for transporting it in time, experts said.

“We don't have enough resources to do proper forecasting. The hike in demand should not have come as a surprise,” Garg said.

“There is enough coal, but a lack of anticipation and planning” caused problems, said Sunil Dahiya, an analyst at the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air. “This could have been avoided.”

Some of the shortfall could also have been met with imported coal, Garg said. But global prices have shot up since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reaching \$400 per ton in March, putting it out of reach for perennially cash-strapped power distribution companies.

Analysts expect demand to dip in the coming weeks, especially if the heat subsides, but it is likely to surge again in July and August, driven by rising humidity and the planting season in some Indian states. It is also the start of the monsoon, when heavy rains can flood coal mines and disrupt both mining and supply.

A similar energy crisis occurred last October following unusually heavy rains that flooded several mines.

The freeing up of freight trains to transport coal is likely to ease the situation and provide some relief, but it isn't a long-term solution, experts said.

With climate change exacerbating heat waves, energy shortfalls will become more routine and demand will only rise further. But the answer is not to open new mines or add more coal to India's energy mix, because that will increase greenhouse gases that in turn will trap more heat, experts said.

“We need to aggressively focus on bolstering renewable energy and making it more reliable. Otherwise, the same issues will keep occurring, because we are too reliant on this one source of fuel,” Dahiya said.

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HEADLINE	05/02 US: Russia to annex parts eastern Ukraine
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-official-russia-plans-annex-parts-eastern-ukraine-84460964
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine -- Russia plans to annex much of eastern Ukraine later this month, a senior U.S. official warned, and the Mariupol steel mill that is the city's last stronghold of resistance came under renewed assault a day after the first evacuation of civilians from the plant.</p> <p>Michael Carpenter, U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said Monday that the U.S. believes the Kremlin also will recognize the southern city of Kherson as an independent republic. Neither move would be recognized by the United States or its allies, he said.</p> <p>Russia is planning to hold sham referendums in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that would “try to add a veneer of democratic or electoral legitimacy” and attach the entities to Russia, Carpenter said. He also said there were signs that Russia would engineer an independence vote in Kherson.</p> <p>Mayors and local legislators there have been abducted, internet and cellphone service has been severed and a Russian school curriculum will soon be imposed, Carpenter said. Ukraine's government says Russia has introduced its ruble as currency there.</p> <p>More than 100 people — including elderly women and mothers with small children — left Mariupol's rubble-strewn Azovstal steelworks Sunday and set out in buses and ambulances for the Ukrainian-controlled city of Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) to the northwest. Mariupol Deputy Mayor Sergei Orlov told the BBC that the evacuees were making slow progress.</p> <p>Authorities gave no explanation for the delay.</p>

At least some of the civilians were apparently taken to a village controlled by Russia-backed separatists. The Russian military said some chose to stay in separatist areas, while dozens left for Ukrainian-held territory.

In the past, Ukraine has accused Moscow's troops of taking civilians against their will to Russia or Russian-controlled areas. The Kremlin has denied it.

The Russian bombardment of the sprawling plant by air, tank and ship resumed after the partial evacuation, Ukraine's Azov Battalion, which is helping to defend the mill, said on the Telegram messaging app.

Orlov said high-level negotiations were underway among Ukraine, Russia and international organizations on evacuating more people.

The steel-plant evacuation, if successful, would be rare progress in easing the human cost of the almost 10-week war, which has caused particular suffering in Mariupol. Previous attempts to open safe corridors out of the southern port city and other places have broken down, with Ukrainian officials accusing Russian forces of shooting and shelling along agreed-on evacuation routes.

Before the weekend evacuation, overseen by the United Nations and the Red Cross, about 1,000 civilians were believed to be in the plant along with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian defenders who have refused Russian demands they surrender.

As many as 100,000 people overall may still be in Mariupol, which had a prewar population of more than 400,000. Russian forces have pounded much of the city into rubble, trapping civilians with little food, water, heat or medicine.

Some Mariupol residents left on their own, often in damaged private cars.

As sunset approached, Mariupol resident Yaroslav Dmytryshyn rattled up to a reception center in Zaporizhzhia in a car with a back seat full of youngsters and two signs taped to the back window: "Children" and "Little ones."

"I can't believe we survived," he said, looking worn but in good spirits after two days on the road.

"There is no Mariupol whatsoever," he said. "Someone needs to rebuild it, and it will take millions of tons of gold." He said they lived just across the railroad tracks from the steel plant. "Ruined," he said. "The factory is gone completely."

Anastasiia Dembytska, who took advantage of the cease-fire to leave with her daughter, nephew and dog, said she could see the steelworks from her window, when she dared to look.

"We could see the rockets flying" and clouds of smoke over the plant, she said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told Greek state television that remaining civilians in the steel plant were afraid to board buses, fearing they would be taken to Russia. He said the U.N. assured him they could go to areas his government controls.

Mariupol lies in the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, and is key to Russia's campaign in the east. Its capture would deprive Ukraine of a vital port, allow Russia to establish a land corridor to the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014, and free up troops for fighting elsewhere.

More than 1 million people, including nearly 200,000 children, have been taken from Ukraine to Russia since the Russian invasion began, Russia's Defense Ministry said Monday, according to TASS.

Defense Ministry official Mikhail Mizintsev said that number included 11,550 people, including 1,847 children, in the previous 24 hours, “without the participation of the Ukrainian authorities.”

Those civilians “were evacuated to the territory of the Russian Federation from the dangerous regions of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics,” and other parts of Ukraine, according to the report. No details were provided.

Zelenskyy said Monday that at least 220 Ukrainian children have been killed by the Russian army since the war began, and 1,570 educational institutions have been destroyed or damaged.

Failing to seize Kyiv, the capital, Russian President Vladimir Putin shifted his focus to the Donbas, where Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukrainian forces since 2014.

Russia said it struck dozens of military targets in the region, including concentrations of troops and weapons and an ammunition depot near Chervone in the Zaporizhzhia region, west of the Donbas.

Ukrainian and Western officials say Moscow's troops are firing indiscriminately, killing many civilians while making only slow progress.

The governor of the Odesa region along the Black Sea Coast, Maksym Marchenko, said on Telegram that a Russian missile strike Monday caused deaths and injuries. He gave no details. Zelenskyy said the attack destroyed a dormitory and killed a 14-year-old boy.

Ukraine said Russia also struck a strategic road and rail bridge west of Odesa. The bridge was heavily damaged in previous Russian strikes, and its destruction would cut a supply route for weapons and other cargo from neighboring Romania.

Ukraine claimed to have destroyed two small Russian patrol boats in the Black Sea.

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HEADLINE	05/02 'The Great Resignation' what it means
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/great-resignation-origins-means-future-business/story?id=84222583
GIST	<p>In 2021, more than 47 million Americans quit their jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics - the most resignations on record. As resignation rates remain high in early 2022, in what has been since deemed by some as “The Great Resignation,” many are wondering if there is a shift in the way Americans are viewing work.</p> <p>Desmond Dickerson, the Director of Future of Work Marketing at Microsoft, describes himself as a futurist. He said that pandemic remote work was just a “kickstart” to The Great Resignation.</p> <p>“If you're leaving the job previously [before the pandemic], that means uprooting,” said Dickerson. “But now all that needs to happen is that you toss one laptop to the side and then bring in a new one... So that barrier to entry for transitioning to jobs has changed.”</p> <p>The pandemic radically changed how Americans work. Many turned homes into offices and some frontline workers began risking their lives for a paycheck. After the federal government spent nearly \$2 trillion in a COVID-19 relief package, the economic rebound from the pandemic accelerated.</p> <p>Although some businesses are now booming, they are having to fight hard to keep employees.</p> <p>In late 2020, Anthony Klotz, an associate professor of business at Texas A&M, said he saw The Great Resignation coming. During the pandemic, he says he noticed four signals: a backlog of resignations, widespread burnout, people reevaluating their relationship with work and, finally, the opportunity of remote work.</p>

“Once the threat of the pandemic started to lift, it made sense to me that many of these individuals would enact their plans to quit their jobs... People reevaluating what work meant to them,” said Klotz. “It seemed like there was a big disconnect there between what employees, what workers wanted and what organizational leaders were hoping would happen coming out of the pandemic.”

Dickerson said that the shift in mentality is evident in new job postings.

“Throughout the pandemic, we've seen remote work go from the margins into the mainstream, and the [data on LinkedIn is showing us that one in seven jobs](#) that are being posted right now have a remote or hybrid work component,” said Dickerson. “In March of 2020, that number was 1 in 67.”

While some are able to work from home, frontline workers continued to work in-person during the pandemic in order to keep grocery stores, restaurants and hospitals running. Overall frontline work pays less than the remote jobs from home and many frontline workers became fed-up because they felt like they were being unfairly treated, said Klotz.

“It's really interesting for the individuals who have in-person work that are not able to switch to remote work,” said Klotz. “I think those individuals felt especially unfairly treated by the pandemic because not only did they have to work in-person, but they also saw another half of the population who are working remotely.”

From 1980 to 2019, according to [the Economic Policy Institute](#), there has been a continual increase in pay rates of high earners, graduates and professionals but low earners remained flat.

Nicholas Bloom, an Economics professor at Stanford University, said that the job market has now shifted and front line workers have more of a say.

“For the first time, maybe in decades, [historically low earners] can say, ‘Look, I can quit my job easily, find another job and get a pay increase at the same time,’” said Bloom. “And in fact, that's why they're quitting. People aren't quitting, mainly because they're dissatisfied with their current jobs, they're generally quitting to get another job.”

Bloom said that the flexibility of finding a new job also applies to remote workers and employers are adding permanent remote work or hybrid options to hire and retain talent.

“Nobody I talk to is thinking of going back. I'm not aware of anyone who successfully got professionals back five days a week. I just don't think it will happen,” said Bloom.

According to Microsoft's Work Trend Index, [53% of people surveyed said that](#) they are putting more focus on their own mental health and wellbeing.

Dickerson said remote work has allowed people to do so.

“Organizations and leaders need to be very intentional about how they're building this new future of work,” said Dickerson.

Before the pandemic, it was assumed that remote work would lead to unproductive results, but [since then critics have been proven wrong](#), according to Klotz. The tricky thing is that although people can still be productive from home, some companies can still argue the value of face-to-face interactions.

“We're in a bit of a golden age of business experimentation,” said Klotz. “The exciting thing is that the nine-to-five work week is not going to be replaced by some other single type of work arrangement. What it's being replaced by is an almost infinite number of work arrangements.”

As people begin to adjust to things like hybrid schedules - a mix between in-person and remote work - the pandemic has opened the door to a massive shift in how companies work with their people as individuals.

	<p>“I’m regularly cautioning companies to avoid making decisions just among senior executives,” said Bloom. “We see quite large variations in how much people want to work from home, by age, by gender, whether they have kids, by race, by commute, time, by disability status.”</p> <p>Klotz said he believes that even before “The Great Resignation,” a conversation of work-life balance was already happening just below the surface.</p> <p>“It gives us this opportunity to really question the fundamental way that we were working with employees in 2019 and say, ‘How do we fix this to hopefully lower these turnover rates back down to where they were maybe 10 years ago or so?’” said Klotz.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 NM wildfire threatens multiple cities
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/mexico-wildfire-threatens-multiple-cities-critical-fire-risk/story?id=84440711
GIST	<p>Wildfires are continuing to scorch through the Western U.S., fueled by high winds, low humidity and arid landscapes.</p> <p>The Calf Canyon Fire and the Hermits Peak Fire in New Mexico have burned through more than 120,000 acres after they combined east of Santa Fe last week. The combined fire is only 10% contained, according to the U.S. Forest Service.</p> <p>Overnight, the fire pushed north toward the cities of Cleveland and Mora, and there is a high probability that winds will push the blaze south of Mora on Monday, officials said.</p> <p>Structure protection teams are working on all sides of the fire. Firefighters are working to create a dozer line behind some homes in the area as well as a strong fire break northwest of Las Vegas, New Mexico, with southeast heavy winds threatening to push fires further into that city. The fire is also burning near Las Tusas, New Mexico, officials said.</p> <p>Fire risk remains critical across New Mexico and into parts of western Texas on Monday, with relative humidity forecast at only 5% and winds gusting up to 50 mph.</p> <p>Dangerous fire conditions have persisted throughout the region over the past several weeks.</p> <p>The Cooks Peak Fire in northern New Mexico has burned through more than 59,000 acres since it sparked on April 17 and is nearly 70% contained, according to officials.</p> <p>Much of the West has been experiencing drought conditions for three consecutive years without any significant recovery in sight, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.</p> <p>As global temperatures continue to rise, a decadeslong megadrought is expected to intensify and expand east, which will increase conditions for megafires to spark, according to officials.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/02 Russia reroutes internet occupied Ukraine
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ukraine-internet-blackout-kherson-skynet-russia/
GIST	After knocking out the internet service in Kherson, Ukraine, this weekend, Russian forces reinstated service but routed it through Russia’s network instead of Ukrainian telecommunications infrastructure.

Ukrainian officials and internet access monitor Netblocks said there was [a near-total internet blackout](#) across Kherson on Saturday, knocking out the connectivity of Ukrainian providers like Ukrtelecom, Kyivstar and Volia.

The State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection of Ukraine (SSSCIP) [said](#) the disconnection was “caused by line breakages at fiber optic backbones and by a power outage with service operators’ equipment in these regions.”

Service returned on Sunday but connectivity through regional Ukrainian provider Skynet (Khersontelecom) is now being routed through Russia’s Miranda and Rostelecom networks.

Kherson [was the first major Ukrainian city taken by Russian forces](#) after the invasion began in February.

The SSSCIP said that in addition to Kherson, parts of Zaporizhzhia were also affected by the switch.

The goal was to make Russia’s “false propaganda an uncontested source of information,” according to the SSSCIP, which added that Russian forces also wanted to show some signs of success in the conflict by creating “people’s republics” in occupied territory.

“No wonder that right after communication was disabled, the enemy media started to spread fake news saying that it was the Ukrainian Government that ordered to shut the connection off. This is a lie, because we have always stood for maximum access to any means of communication for all Ukrainians,” the SSSCIP said.

Disabling Ukrainian communications is part of Russia’s effort “to make at least an appearance of a new quasi-state” in the occupied areas to show Russians that the Kremlin is making progress in the war. The United Kingdom’s Ministry of Defense [said on Sunday](#) that Russia was attempting to legitimize its control of Kherson by installing Russian government officials in power and switching the local currency from the Ukrainian hryvnia to the Russian rouble.

The SSSCIP noted that Russian forces have disabled terrestrial broadcasting, telecommunication and the internet but told those who are still in Kherson to use radios “on the medium waveband (1278, 1404, 873, 657 kHz).”

Doug Madory, director of Internet Analysis at network observability company Kentik, [explained on Twitter](#) that Khersontelecom service was restored “via Russian transit from nearby Crimea.”

He added that Russian forces did something similar after capturing Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014.

Ihor Kolykhaiev, the former Ukrainian mayor of Kherson, [told the BBC](#) that about 40% of the city’s population has fled since the Russian takeover in March.

Multiple news outlets said Russia [plans to hold a referendum](#) in the region to certify its rule of the area. “I am afraid of a humanitarian catastrophe. I am worried for the people who are still in the city today. They are all hostages,” Kolykhaiev told the BBC.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Phony disclosure request to Twitter?
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/twitter-emergency-disclosure-request-lalartu-aleksandr-sikerin-revil-ransomware-researcher-threats/
GIST	A man living in Russia whom the U.S. government accused of being involved in multiple REvil ransomware attacks may be involved in a phony emergency disclosure request to Twitter used to threaten a ransomware researcher in recent weeks and force them offline.

Twitter's [policies state](#) the company will provide account information "to law enforcement in response to a valid emergency disclosure request." The "quickest and most efficient method," the company says, it through its legal request submissions site.

[Twitter received 12,370](#) government information requests between January and June 2021, the latest period for which data is available, with emergency requests making up about 15%, [according to data](#) posted to the company's site.

The disclosure request was just one part of an ongoing and escalating series of threats against researchers and at least one blogger by a cybercriminal known as "Lalartu" or "Sheriff" — or someone trying to pose as them — nicknames that [security researchers in the past have tied](#) to Aleksandr Sikerin. Federal prosecutors in Texas [said in a November 2021 filing](#) that Sikerin was most recently living in St. Petersburg, Russia, and had been an affiliate of the notorious [REvil](#) ransomware crew.

This person has in recent weeks threatened a blogger and their family, and also threatened a cybersecurity researcher with planting articles accusing the researcher of being a pedophile.

In an online chat with CyberScoop, a person claiming to be Sikerin said they've been threatening the researchers and the blogger because they make his work harder, and because the person said they hate Americans. The person claimed without proof that recent allegations that Sikerin is also "Lalartu" and "Sheriff" are true.

"i hate americans and i also hate researchers," they said, referring to information security researchers who focus on ransomware activities. "i hate when they waste my time during negotiations. makes me want to throw the decryption key away you know?"

The person, offering no proof, said they worked with an "american affiliate" using a stolen government email to fake a death threat from the person associated with the Twitter account "Ido_Cohen2," a researcher who regularly tweeted about ransomware incidents and operated the DarkFeed.io ransomware monitoring website. "twitter fell for the bait and gave up all his info."

The person operating the Ido_Cohen2 account could not be reached for comment.

On April 30 a thread posted to a dark web forum under the username "RichTheKid" detailed what they claimed was a step-by-step on how to create and submit an emergency disclosure request to Twitter. The instructions included a section on faking an emergency. "say that the user has kidnapped a someone (sic) or they are part of a criminal group ... and they extort children [to be honest I don't care], just make sure its a good enough story to cause a response," they wrote.

Twitter has not responded to multiple requests for comment about the account in question or the emergency disclosure request.

The apparent phony data request represents [the latest troubling example](#) of hackers and others using compromised government or law enforcement emails to compel major tech companies to turn over users' private data.

Ransomware operators often "feel cornered, and they feel the need to strike back. And so they're getting viscerally more aggressive at striking back."

Claims about the Twitter emergency disclosure request surfaced in [an April 20 post on Databreaches.net](#), a site that covers data breaches and other cybersecurity matters. In the post, a blogger working under the pseudonym Dissent Doe reported that someone they suspected to be "a Russian threat actor" contacted them on April 12 to say that a researcher tweeting under the name "ido_cohen2" was going to get "a visit to his house."

That supposed “Russian threat actor” then sent a screenshot of what looked like a directory containing Twitter data associated with that account. The person claiming to be Sikerin provided the same screenshot in the chat with CyberScoop April 28.

Screenshot of Twitter data shared by Sikerin with CyberScoop April 28.

A few days later, the Twitter account for [VX-Underground](#), an online library of malware samples, [tweeted](#) that the researcher, Ido Cohen 2, “was doxed and has left Twitter.” In recent days the Twitter account has returned, but the name has been changed to “Offline,” and the bio simply reads “Closed.”

On April 24 [Dissent Doe went into more detail](#) on the threats against them and the others. On May 1, [Dissent Doe tweeted](#) they had interviewed “RichTheKid,” who told them that they were paid to file 20 data requests, including the one on Ido_Cohen2. “i have seen how this data can be used first hand its not pleasant,” the person told Dissent Doe.

RichTheKid told CyberScoop in an online chat Monday that Twitter did fulfill the emergency disclosure request in “less than 5 hours,” and that RichTheKid made the request after “sheriff” asked them to do so.

In since-deleted tweets, another one of the threatened researchers, who goes by the name pancak3 on Twitter, posted screenshots of an alleged chat between themselves and someone they claimed was Sikerin. In the chat, the person said it was “funny when we encrypt the hospitals,” and referenced a 2019 incident where [a ransomware attack involving a hospital](#) may have contributed to the death of newborn child. “i hope when you have a baby he dies just like this,” Sikerin said to the researcher.

[U.S. prosecutors](#) disclosed in November the August seizure of nearly 40 bitcoin — worth roughly \$2.3 million at the time — from an account they said belonged to Sikerin. In the filing, prosecutors included Sikerin’s last known address and an Gmail email address.

That email address was published by the administrator of BreachForums — an online forum where people post information about stolen data, hacks that took the place of the recently seized RaidForums — after the account holder, “Sheriff,” was accused of spamming, Dissent Doe wrote April 24.

Allan Liska, an intelligence analyst at cybersecurity firm Recorded Future who closely monitors the ransomware ecosystem, said he was familiar with Lalartu from the various dark web forums. Lalartu was more “over the top” than most typical ransomware operators, he said, but overall the situation is becoming more dangerous.

“There is a lot of concern in the community that some of these ransomware actors, him in particular, have gotten very aggressive toward researchers,” Liska said. As researchers and private cybersecurity threat intelligence firms have gotten better at identifying and unmasking aspects of ransomware activity, ransomware operators can often “feel cornered, and they feel the need to strike back. And so they’re getting viscerally more aggressive at striking back.”

The increased aggression may show some level of desperation, Liska added, given the increased law enforcement activity all over the world working to shut down ransomware operations. Nevertheless, ransomware activity continues and researchers are going to have to take more precautions about the type of information they share online.

Twitter, he added, needs to take a hard look at its data sharing policies. While the emergency data request issue affects the entire industry, Twitter in particular needs to step up.

“That’s the medium that so many security researchers use, that’s the medium we use to share information, that’s the medium that we use to communicate with each other, more so than any other,” he said. “Unfortunately Twitter does have a level of responsibility here that they need to figure out.”

	Last week Bloomberg reported that bogus data requests, which have been sent to Twitter and other major firms such as Apple, Meta, Alphabet, and Discord, have been used to harass and sexually extort minors. On March 29, Krebs on Security explored the practice of criminals obtaining data through data requests, with one hacker claiming some companies return data in as little as 30 minutes.
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HEADLINE	05/02 AvosLocker ransomware variant new trick
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/avoslocker-ransomware-variant-using-new.html
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity researchers have disclosed a new variant of the AvosLocker ransomware that disables antivirus solutions to evade detection after breaching target networks by taking advantage of unpatched security flaws.</p> <p>"This is the first sample we observed from the U.S. with the capability to disable a defense solution using a legitimate Avast Anti-Rootkit Driver file (asWarPot.sys)," Trend Micro researchers, Christopher Ordonez and Alvin Nieto, said in a Monday analysis.</p> <p>"In addition, the ransomware is also capable of scanning multiple endpoints for the Log4j vulnerability (Log4shell) using Nmap NSE script."</p> <p>AvosLocker, one of the newer ransomware families to fill the vacuum left by REvil, has been linked to a number of attacks that targeted critical infrastructure in the U.S., including financial services and government facilities.</p> <p>A ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS) affiliate-based group first spotted in July 2021, AvosLocker goes beyond double extortion by auctioning data stolen from victims should the targeted entities refuse to pay the ransom.</p> <p>Other targeted victims claimed by the ransomware cartel are said to be located in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Turkey, the U.A.E., the U.K., Canada, China, and Taiwan, according to an advisory released by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in March 2022.</p> <p>Telemetry data gathered by Trend Micro shows that the food and beverage sector was the most hit industry between July 1, 2021 and February 28, 2022, followed by technology, finance, telecom, and media verticals.</p> <p>The entry point for the attack is believed to have been facilitated by leveraging an exploit for a remote code execution flaw in Zoho's ManageEngine ADSelfService Plus software (CVE-2021-40539) to run an HTML application (HTA) hosted on a remote server.</p> <p>"The HTA executed an obfuscated PowerShell script that contains a shellcode, capable of connecting back to the [command-and-control] server to execute arbitrary commands," the researchers explained.</p> <p>This includes retrieving an ASPX web shell from the server as well as an installer for the AnyDesk remote desktop software, the latter of which is used to deploy additional tools to scan the local network, terminate security software, and drop the ransomware payload.</p> <p>Some of the components copied to the infected endpoint are a Nmap script to scan the network for the Log4Shell remote code execution flaw (CVE-2021-44228) and a mass deployment tool called PDQ to deliver a malicious batch script to multiple endpoints.</p> <p>The batch script, for its part, is equipped with a wide range of capabilities that allows it to disable Windows Update, Windows Defender, and Windows Error Recovery, in addition to preventing safe boot execution of security products, creating a new admin account, and launching the ransomware binary.</p>

	<p>Also used is aswArPot.sys, a legitimate Avast anti-rootkit driver, to kill processes associated with different security solutions by weaponizing a now-fixed vulnerability in the driver the Czech company resolved in June 2021.</p> <p>"The decision to choose the specific rootkit driver file is for its capability to execute in kernel mode (therefore operating at a high privilege)," the researchers pointed out. "This variant is also capable of modifying other details of the installed security solutions, such as disabling the legal notice."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Hackers steal \$90M from 2 DeFi platforms
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/hackers-steal-90-million-from-defi-platforms-rari-capital-and-saddle-finance/
GIST	<p>Two decentralized finance platforms were attacked this weekend by hackers who ended up stealing a total of \$90 million.</p> <p>Rari Capital confirmed reports from several blockchain security companies on April 30 that about \$80 million worth of cryptocurrency was stolen through their platform.</p> <p>Rari Capital's Jack Longarzo said the company was attacked through an exploit and Fei Protocol, a company that merged with Rari Capital, offered the hacker a \$10 million bounty. CoinGecko data shows Fei is the 11th largest stablecoin based on market cap.</p> <p>Blockchain security company BlockSec explained that the hackers used a reentrancy vulnerability. Reentrancy attacks involve bugs in contracts that allow an attacker to withdraw funds repeatedly in a loop before the original transaction is approved or declined or the funds need to be returned.</p> <p>Over the last year, several DeFi platforms have been hit with reentrancy attacks, including Revest Finance, Ola Finance, and Cream Finance.</p> <p>Longarzo said the attack was conducted through Rari Capital's DeFi lending market creator for developers called Fuse. Fixes for the vulnerability are being worked on, according to Longarzo, but the company did not respond to requests for comment about how user's will be compensated for their losses.</p> <p>Rari Capital previously lost \$15 million in cryptocurrency during a price manipulation attack in May 2021.</p> <p>On April 30, another platform – Saddle Finance – reported that about \$10.3 million was stolen from their platform.</p> <p>They attempted to contact the hacker to offer a bounty but noted that BlockSec managed to get \$3.8 million worth of stolen funds back to Saddle Finance.</p> <p>The company said it would pay BlockSec about \$380,000 for returning some of the stolen funds. They are in the process of deciding how to reimburse users who lost funds in the attack and wrote that they plan to put the decision up for a vote.</p> <p>Saddle Finance allows users to sell and trade stablecoins – cryptocurrencies pegged to fiat money.</p> <p>Blockchain security firm PeckShield said 3,633 ETH stolen during the attack are still in the attacker's account but 300 ETH – about \$850,000 – has already been deposited into cryptocurrency mixing service Tornado.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 GitHub: recent attack highly targeted
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/github-says-recent-attack-was-highly-targeted

GIST	<p>Microsoft-owned code hosting platform GitHub says the recent cyberattack that resulted in the cloning of private repositories was highly targeted in nature.</p> <p>Disclosed in mid-April, the incident involved stolen OAuth tokens issued to third-party integrators Heroku and Travis CI, which were used to download the private repositories of dozens of organizations.</p> <p>The two continuous integration (CI) systems help organizations automate the scanning of newly introduced code changes, to help identify vulnerabilities and malicious snippets before they enter production.</p> <p>These systems use authentication tokens to facilitate the automaton process, and the recent cyberattack happened after such tokens were compromised.</p> <p>The tokens are not stored by GitHub in their original format, meaning that a threat actor obtaining them would not be able to abuse them in attacks, the platform says.</p> <p>Using the stolen tokens, the attackers authenticated to the GitHub API and then listed all of the organizations for all accounts they could access. Next, the attackers selected targets of interest and proceeded to list and download their private repositories.</p> <p>After analyzing the attackers' behavior, GitHub concluded that they were listing organizations solely with the purpose of identifying accounts and private repositories to clone.</p> <p>"GitHub believes these attacks were highly targeted based on the available information and our analysis of the attacker behavior using the compromised OAuth tokens issued to Travis CI and Heroku," the code hosting platform notes.</p> <p>GitHub also says it is now in the process of sending the final set of notifications to the users/organizations impacted in the attack, but encourages users to monitor Heroku and Travis CI for future updates on the matter.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Car rental giant facing disruptions
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/car-rental-giant-sixt-facing-disruptions-due-to-a-cyberattack/
GIST	<p>Car rental giant Sixt was hit by a weekend cyberattack causing business disruptions at customer care centers and select branches.</p> <p>Sixt is a German-based vehicle rental, car sharing, and ride-hailing service provider operating about two thousand locations in over 105 countries.</p> <p>Sixt announced today that they suffered a cyberattack on April 29th that forced them to restrict access to all IT systems, except for those crucial for continuing business like the main website and the apps.</p> <p>This shut down of IT systems is causing business disruption for Sixt customers, agents, and service points, but according to the firm, the impact has been kept to a minimum.</p> <p><i>"Impacts on the company, its operations and services have been minimized to provide business continuity for customers. However, temporary disruptions, in particular in customer care centers and selective branches, are likely to occur in the short term."</i> - Sixt</p> <p>According to German media, most car bookings from Friday morning were carried out using pen and paper as systems were down.</p>

	<p>Moreover, clients who called the company heard a recorded message telling them, “Due to a technical problem, we are currently unavailable and can only process e-mail inquiries with a delay.”</p> <p>With the tourist season approaching in the Northern hemisphere, large companies engaging in tourism, like Sixt, are bound to face more trouble from malicious actors like ransomware gangs.</p> <p>For now, no further details about the type of cyberattack have been provided, and Sixt was limited to saying it continues its investigations with the help of internal and external experts.</p> <p>The firm’s announcement also asks customers for their understanding and patience and promises to provide further updates on the matter soon.</p> <p>Bleeping Computer has emailed Sixt with questions about the attack and will update this post if we receive a response.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 ‘Moshen Dragon’ targets Asian telcos
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chinese-cyber-espionage-group-moshen-dragon-targets-asian-telcos/
GIST	<p>Researchers have identified a new cluster of malicious cyber activity tracked as Moshen Dragon, targeting telecommunication service providers in Central Asia.</p> <p>While this new threat group has some overlaps with "RedFoxtrot" and "Nomad Panda," including the use of ShadowPad and PlugX malware variants, there are enough differences in their activity to follow them separately.</p> <p>According to a new report by Sentinel Labs, Moshen Dragon is a skilled hacking group with the ability to adjust its approach depending on the defenses they're facing.</p> <p>The hackers engage extensively in trying to sideload malicious Windows DLLs into antivirus products, steal credentials to move laterally, and eventually exfiltrate data from infected machines.</p> <p>Attack details</p> <p>At this time, the infection vector is unknown, so Sentinel Lab's report begins with the antivirus abuse, which includes products from TrendMicro, Bitdefender, McAfee, Symantec, and Kaspersky.</p> <p>Because these AV products run with high privileges on Windows OS, side-loading a malicious DLL on their process enables the hackers to run code on the machine with few restrictions and potentially evade detection.</p> <p>Moshen Dragon uses this method to deploy Impacket, a Python kit made to facilitate lateral movement and remote code execution via Windows Management Instrumentation (WMI).</p> <p>Impacket also helps with credential-stealing, incorporating an open-source tool that captures the details of password change events on a domain and writes them to the "C:\Windows\Temp\FILTER.log" file.</p> <p>Having access to neighboring systems, the threat group drops a passive loader on them that confirms it's on the right machine before activating by comparing the hostname to a hardcoded value.</p> <p>As Sentinel Labs suggests, this is an indication that the threat actor generates a unique DLL for each of the machines it targets, another indication of their sophistication and diligence.</p> <p>The loader utilizes the WinDivert packet sniffer to intercept incoming traffic until it gets the string required for self-decryption and then unpacks and launches the payload (SNAC.log or bdch.tmp).</p>

According to Sentinel Labs, the payloads include variants of PlugX and ShadowPad, two backdoors that [multiple Chinese APTs](#) have used in recent years. The final goal of the threat actor is to exfiltrate data from as many systems as possible.

Loader seen in US govt systems too

An interesting finding is that the loader analyzed by Sentinel Labs this time has been spotted again by Avast researchers in December 2021, who [discovered it](#) in a US government system.

This could mean that Moshen Dragon has multiple targets or shifted its focus, or simply that multiple Chinese APTs use the particular loader.

Considering that these groups share many similarities in the final payloads they deploy on the target systems, it wouldn't be surprising if they used the same or similar loaders too.

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HEADLINE	05/02 New, uncommonly stealthy APT group
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cyberspies-use-ip-cameras-to-deploy-backdoors-steal-exchange-emails/
GIST	<p>A newly discovered and uncommonly stealthy Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) group is breaching corporate networks to steal Exchange (on-premise and online) emails from employees involved in corporate transactions such as mergers and acquisitions.</p> <p>Mandiant researchers, who discovered the threat actor and now track it as UNC3524, say the group has demonstrated its "advanced" capabilities as it maintained access to its victims' environments for more than 18 months (in some cases).</p> <p>"Once UNC3524 successfully obtained privileged credentials to the victim's mail environment, they began making Exchange Web Services (EWS) API requests to either the on-premises Microsoft Exchange or Microsoft 365 Exchange Online environment," Mandiant said.</p> <p>"In each of the UNC3524 victim environments, the threat actor would target a subset of mailboxes, focusing their attention on executive teams and employees that work in corporate development, mergers and acquisitions, or IT security staff."</p> <p>UNC3524 can persist by deploying a newly found backdoor dubbed QUIETEXIT (developed using the open-source Dropbear SSH software as inspiration) on network appliances with no support for security monitoring and malware detection tools.</p> <p>In some attacks, UNC3524 has also deployed the reGeorg web shell (a version linked by the NSA to the Russian-sponsored APT28/Fancy Bear group) on DMZ web servers to create a SOCKS tunnel as an alternate access point into its victims' networks.</p> <p>By deploying its malware on these devices (e.g., wireless access point controllers, SAN arrays, and load balancers), UNC3524 greatly extends the interval between initial access to when victims detect its malicious activity and cut off access.</p> <p>However, even when that happens, Mandiant says the threat group "wasted no time re-compromising the environment with a variety of mechanisms, immediately restarting their data theft campaign."</p> <p>The QUIETEXIT backdoor command-and-control servers are part of a botnet built by compromising Internet exposed LifeSize and D-Link IP videoconferencing camera systems, likely with default credentials.</p>

	<p>After gaining access and deploying its backdoors, UNC3524 obtained privileged credentials to their victims' mail environment and started targeting on-premises Microsoft Exchange or Microsoft 365 Exchange Online mailboxes via Exchange Web Services (EWS) API requests.</p> <p>They usually steal all emails received by "executive teams and employees that work in corporate development, mergers and acquisitions, or IT security staff" over a specific date range instead of picking emails of interest or using keyword-filtering (this is a tactic used by Russian-backed Cozy Bear/APT29).</p> <p>Given that UNC3524 has used tactics and tools previously linked to multiple Russian-backed hacking groups (including APT28 and APT29), Mandiant said that attribution is hazy and cannot link this activity to a specific threat group.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 APT29 targets diplomats, governments
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/130787/apt/apt29-targets-diplomats.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Russia-linked APT29 (Cozy Bear or Nobelium) launched a spear-phishing campaign targeting diplomats and government entities.</p> <p>In mid-January 2022, security researchers from Mandiant have spotted a spear-phishing campaign, launched by the Russia-linked APT29 group, on targeting diplomats and government entities.</p> <p>The Russia-linked APT29 group (aka SVR, Cozy Bear, and The Dukes) has been active since at least 2014, along with APT28 cyber espionage group was involved in the Democratic National Committee hack and the wave of attacks aimed at the 2016 US Presidential Elections.</p> <p>The messages used in the recent campaign uncovered by Mandiant, are sent from compromised email addresses belonging to embassies. The phishing emails masqueraded as administrative notices related to various embassies. Nation-state actors used Atlassian Trello, DropBox, and cloud services, as part of their command and control (C2) infrastructure.</p> <p>The experts observed multiple waves of attacks between January 2022 and March 2022.</p> <p><i>“APT29 targeted large lists of recipients that Mandiant suspected were primarily publicly listed points of contact of embassy personnel. These phishing emails utilized a malicious HTML dropper tracked as ROOTSAW, that makes use of a technique known as HTML smuggling to deliver an IMG or ISO file to a victim system.” reads the analysis published by Mandiant.</i></p> <p>The messages used the HTML smuggling technique to deliver an IMG or ISO file to the victims.</p> <p>The ISO image contains a Windows shortcut file (LNK), that executed an embedded malicious DLL file when clicked. Upon opening the attachment, the ROOTSAW HTML dropper will write an IMG or ISO file to disk. The image file contains a Windows shortcut (LNK) file and a malicious DLL. One clicked the LNK file, the malicious DLL is executed. To trick the victim into clicking the LNK file, attackers used a fake icon to trick the victim into believing that the file is a legitimate document file.</p> <p>Once executed the DLL, the BEATDROP downloader is delivered and executed in memory.</p> <p><i>“BEATDROP is a downloader written in C that makes use of Trello for C2. Once executed, BEATDROP first maps its own copy of ntdll.dll into memory for the purpose of executing shellcode in its own process. BEATDROP first creates a suspended thread with RtlCreateUserThread which points to NtCreateFile.” continues the report. “Following this, BEATDROP will enumerate the system for the username, computer name, and IP address. This information is used to create a victim ID, which is used by BEATDROP to store and retrieve victim payloads from its C2. Once the victim ID is created, BEATDROP will make an initial request to Trello to identify whether the current victim has already been compromised.”</i></p>

	<p>Experts also reported that APT29 replaced BEATDROP with a new C++ BEACON loader based on Cobalt Strike. The beacon implements backdoor capabilities, including</p> <p>These capabilities include keylogging, taking screenshot, harvesting account credentials, exfiltrating data, port scanning, and more.</p> <p>Once gained a foothold in the target network, APT29 quickly attempt to escalate privileges, in some cases the attackers were able to gain Domain Admin in less than 12 hours from the phishing attack.</p> <p>Once the threat actors have established access, they perform extensive reconnaissance of hosts and the Active Directory environment. The APT group was also observed conducting on-host reconnaissance to harvest credentials.</p> <p>During this phishing campaign, the APT29 group was observed utilizing multiple malware families, including BEATDROP and BOOMMIC loaders, ROOTSAW dropper HTML file, and the BEACON backdoor.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Study: mental health apps fail security
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/mozilla-finds-mental-health-apps-fail-spectacularly-at-user-data-security/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>An investigation into mental health and prayer apps has revealed a disturbing lack of concern surrounding user security and privacy.</p> <p>On Monday, Mozilla released the findings of a new study into these types of apps, which often deal with sensitive topics including depression, mental health awareness, anxiety, domestic violence, PTSD, and more, alongside religion-themed services.</p> <p>According to Mozilla's latest *Privacy Not Included guide, despite the deeply personal information these apps manage, they "routinely share data, allow weak passwords, target vulnerable users with personalized ads, and feature vague and poorly written privacy policies."</p> <p>In a study of 32 applications geared toward mental health and religion, the organization found that 25 of them did not meet Mozilla's Minimum Security Standards.</p> <p>These standards act as a benchmark for the *Privacy Not Included reports. The mismanagement or unauthorized sharing and sale of user data, vague data management policies, a lack of encryption, weak password policies, no clear vulnerability management system, and other lax security policies can all downgrade a vendor product in the eyes of Mozilla.</p> <p>If an app or service fails to meet these basic requirements, they are slapped with the "*Privacy Not Included" warning label.</p> <p>The mental health and prayer-related apps have received an accolade -- but not one you'd covet. The company says:</p> <p>"When it comes to protecting people's privacy and security, mental health and prayer apps are worse than any other product category Mozilla researchers have reviewed over the past six years."</p> <p>The organization examined apps including Talkspace, Better Help, Calm, Glorify, 7 Cups, Wysa, Headspace, and Better Stop Suicide. As a result, each app now has a dedicated space that can be accessed to find out more about the software's privacy and security rating.</p> <p>For example, Better Stop Suicide, a suicide prevention app, failed Mozilla's test.</p> <p>"Holy vague and messy privacy policy Batman! Better Stop Suicide's privacy policy is bad," Mozilla says. "Like, get a failing grade from your high school English teacher bad."</p>

	<p>While the app gathers some personal information and says that users can reach out to them if they have further queries, they did not respond to Mozilla's attempts at contact and did not mention who "trusted partners" were when data sharing.</p> <p>Only two applications on the list, PTSD Coach and the AI chatbot Wysa seemed to take data management and user privacy seriously.</p> <p>"The vast majority of mental health and prayer apps are exceptionally creepy," commented Jen Caltrider, Mozilla's *Privacy Not Included lead. "They track, share, and capitalize on users' most intimate personal thoughts and feelings, like moods, mental state, and biometric data. Turns out, researching mental health apps is not good for your mental health, as it reveals how negligent and craven these companies can be with our most intimate personal information."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/29 Ukraine's digital battle with Russia
SOURCE	https://www.wired.co.uk/article/ukraine-russia-digital-battle?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>When Russian president Vladimir Putin launched his full invasion of Ukraine in February, the world expected Moscow's cyber and information operations to pummel the country alongside air strikes and shelling. Two months on, however, Kyiv has not only managed to keep the country online amidst a deluge of hacking attempts, but it has brought the fight back to Russia.</p> <p>Even Ukrainian officials are surprised by how ineffective Russia's digital war has been.</p> <p>"I think that the root cause of this is the difference between our systems," says Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine's 31-year-old minister for digital transformation. "Because the Russian system is centralized. It's monopolized. And it leads to the scale of corruption and graft that is becoming increasingly apparent as the war continues."</p> <p>Speaking to WIRED from near Kyiv, Fedorov says his country has been preparing for this moment since Russia first invaded in 2014. "We have had eight years," he says.</p> <p>In recent weeks, Fedorov and the Ukrainian government have deployed the controversial face recognition program ClearviewAI to identify killed and captured Russian soldiers. They have deployed thousands of Elon Musk's Starlink terminals to keep the country connected, even amid Russian bombardment. They have crowdsourced intelligence collection, letting ordinary Ukrainians report troop movements. And, perhaps most critically, they have beaten back aggressive attempts to knock offline their internet, energy, and financial systems.</p> <p>Fedorov, who also serves as deputy prime minister, ran Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky's wildly successful election campaign in 2019, winning by nearly 50 points in the second round against incumbent Petro Poroshenko. He did so, in part, by leveraging authentic selfie videos to market the former comedian as an unconventional politician who eschews the normal trappings of politics. It's exactly that style of video that Zelensky has uploaded regularly from the streets of Kyiv in recent weeks, offering a stark contrast with Putin's stiff proclamations inside his palatial offices.</p> <p>Ukraine has brought the war home to Russia in more cutting ways. In March, Reuters reported that Ukraine had purchased face recognition software from American company Clearview AI to identify the bodies of Russian soldiers killed in action—Kyiv later acknowledged that they were using this information to contact the families of the dead soldiers.</p> <p>"We are pursuing two goals here," Fedorov says. "First is: We are notifying their relatives, and telling them, basically, that it's not a very good idea to go to war with Ukraine. So that serves as a cautionary tale. And secondly, it's a humanitarian purpose—just telling them where their relatives, or friends, or children</p>

are so that they don't try to get this information from the Russian authorities. Because, more often than not, they can't."

That decision hasn't [come without criticism](#). Contacting the families of soldiers killed in battle could be seen as harassment. Others have pointed out that being deployed in Ukraine is a PR coup for ClearviewAI, which has been embroiled in scandal over its [liberal use](#) by police forces across North America.

Fedorov, for his part, says Russia "can spin this whatever way they want. But the fact of the matter is, there are tens of thousands of Russians dying in Ukraine, and we are just providing this information to their families because that serves, among other things, a humanitarian purpose."

There is a propaganda element to Kyiv's use of face recognition technology as well.

"This facial recognition plays to our, let's say, to our advantage in the information space," Fedorov says. Moscow has projected the image of a professional and volunteer fighting force. "We're trying to say that, for example, Russia is sending conscripts ... we are proving that and justifying that with a lot of factual information. We can give you a list of hundreds of people who are 18 and 19 years old, with their names and with their birth dates and how and where specifically, they were conscripted. So that gives some substance to our claims."

Fedorov says the utility goes beyond just identifying the dead.

"One interesting case study of how we used Clearview AI," Fedorov says. "There was a man who was found in a Ukrainian hospital, claiming that he was a Ukrainian soldier who suffered from shell shock or some kind of trauma and that he forgot everything. And he was claiming that he was Ukrainian. So the doctor sent the picture to us, and we were able to ID him in a matter of minutes. We found his social network profile, and we established that he was Russian and, of course, he was brought to responsibility."

Ukrainian officials have said that the frequency of Russian cyberattacks tripled immediately prior to the war, and they have aggressively [targeted critical infrastructure](#) since the war began.

But Viktor Zhora, deputy head of Ukraine's State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection, says Moscow may have maxed out its ability to launch attacks. "Russian cyber operations likely reached their full potential," he says.

Zhora told WIRED that years of training, exercises, and cooperation with NATO have made Ukraine far more resilient to cyberattacks. Some attacks are easier to defend against than others—as we spoke, Zhora said he was monitoring an active attack on the state administration of Lviv, which had been publicly announced by Russia hours earlier.

But Zhora stresses that while it is wrong to overestimate how powerful Russia's cyber capabilities are, it would also be wrong to underestimate its more "sophisticated" operations. "We should continue to observe their potential, like [Sandworm](#), like a [Fancy Bear](#), like [Gamaredon](#), many other groups that are still active, and still very dangerous," he says, referring to a number of Russian government hacker groups.

Brandon Valeriano, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute who specializes in cyber operations, says offensive cyber operations don't mesh well with traditional, kinetic warfare. At best, he says, "they're enabling, they're complimentary ... they don't transform it."

Valeriano points to a slowdown in the tempo of Russian-backed cyberattacks targeting the United States as evidence that Moscow's capacity isn't as expansive as some have assessed. "They're not organized for offensive cyber operations in the way that we think they are," he says.

Kyiv's ability to beat back against those operations, Valeriano says, can be attributed to "intense collaboration between Ukraine, Western powers, and NATO." Indeed, Five Eyes signals intelligence

agencies have both been providing training and support for Ukraine's cyber defense and have been sharing threat intelligence. (Zhora stresses that information-sharing is a "two-way road.")

Ukraine has been able to defend itself, both in cyberspace and in an outright propaganda war, because it has managed to stay online. For that, Fedorov credits a decentralized network of internet service providers and Elon Musk.

"It wouldn't be possible to restore 10 km of cable connection between villages in Chernigiv region after serious battles so quick," [he tweeted](#) earlier this month. "Normally it takes few months." But with one Starlink satellite, he says, five villages were reconnected in a matter of days.

"We have received over 10,000 Starlink terminals to date, and we use those where we have blind spots with, let's say, more traditional coverage," Fedorov says. "So we are trying very hard to restore and protect our landline and mobile connections."

Like any physical infrastructure, those Starlink terminals—which have even managed to keep the embattled city of Mariupol online—have been vulnerable to Russian shelling. Zhora says Russia has managed to hit some of those terminals but has not managed to target the system as a whole. "I suppose that it was coincidence that some shells hit these terminals and locations," Zhora says. "It's not easy to identify and to attack them systematically."

Keeping Ukrainians online is a clear strategic objective for Ukraine. Photo and video evidence of the brutality being doled out by the Russian army has galvanized Western support for Kyiv and led to an unprecedented level of support from NATO to help the country defend itself.

It's also letting regular Ukrainians contribute to the collective defense.

During Zelensky's presidential campaign, Fedorov made particular use of the messaging app [Telegram](#), which is also popular with Russian intelligence operatives. In recent weeks, the app has been leveraged to collect evidence of possible war crimes in towns like Bucha, but also to enable Ukrainians to upload details of Russian troop movements.

A Telegram bot collects photos and videos of Russian military movements, verifying Ukrainians through their digital ID, a project spearheaded by Fedorov.

"Regular internet users—so, basically, civilians—they can go and post photos of what's happening in Ukraine," Fedorov says.

The Ukrainian security ministry said in a tweet in March that those crowdsourced reports have [directly contributed](#) to drone strikes against Russian tanks.

"There are actually very many ways that regular citizens can contribute to the effort," Fedorov says. One particularly "successful vector," he says, is basically trolling. His government has been sending users "into the comment sections of posts by some very high traffic Russian influencers and just trying to talk sense into people and telling them that there's actually a war in Ukraine."

Fedorov is also responsible for [Ukraine's IT Army](#), a network of cyber activists and hackers who have targeted Russian systems. In recent weeks, they have [dumped huge troves of personal information](#) from large Russian corporations.

Russia's poor information security has also been a significant factor in their fumbled invasion.

A huge number of technology providers, from cybersecurity firms to cloud hosting services, have pulled out of Russia since the start of the war—either due to sanctions or to a concerted push from Fedorov and others in the Ukrainian government. "If the world were able to stop the delivery of these products to Russia, we see that they will have no infrastructure even to organize attacks," Zhora says.

	<p>Russia's attempts to knock out mobile and internet connections in Ukraine have mired their own communications. Their encrypted radio platform, Era, has been unreliable, leading Russian soldiers to opt for unencrypted platforms.</p> <p>Numerous outlets have reported details of conversations between Russians troops, their commanders, and their families—some even admitting to possible war crimes over unencrypted channels.</p> <p>While Fedorov's reform mission has played a large role in modernizing Ukraine, support from the West has certainly helped. SpaceX and the United States have sent some 5,000 Starlink terminals. Fedorov says the European Union has provided some 10 million euros toward computer systems and workstations.</p> <p>Asked what Ukraine needs as the war wears into its third month, Fedorov mentions satellite equipment, including more Starlink terminals, as well as laptops, tablets, and other tools "to put our civilian infrastructure back online." He also jokes: "Let's say that the most surefire way to keep us online for a very long time to come is to provide us with artillery, tanks, and warplanes—because that will effectively end the war. And that will remove the problem altogether."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Chinese 'Override Panda' hackers resurface
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/chinese-override-panda-hackers.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A Chinese state-sponsored espionage group known as Override Panda has resurfaced in recent weeks with a new phishing attack with the goal of stealing sensitive information.</p> <p>"The Chinese APT used a spear-phishing email to deliver a beacon of a Red Team framework known as 'Viper,'" Cluster25 said in a report published last week.</p> <p>"The target of this attack is currently unknown but with high probability, given the previous history of the attack perpetrated by the group, it might be a government institution from a South Asian country."</p> <p>Override Panda, also called Naikon, Hellsing, and Bronze Geneva, is known to operate on behalf of Chinese interests since at least 2005 to conduct intelligence-gathering operations targeting ASEAN countries.</p> <p>Attack chains unleashed by the threat actor have involved the use of decoy documents attached to spear-phishing emails that are designed to entice the intended victims to open and compromise themselves with malware.</p> <p>Last April, the group was linked to a wide-ranging cyberespionage campaign directed against military organizations in Southeast Asia. Then in August 2021, Naikon was implicated in cyberattacks targeting the telecom sector in the region in late 2020.</p> <p>The latest campaign spotted by Cluster25 is no different in that it leverages a weaponized Microsoft Office document to kick-start the infection killchain that includes a loader designed to launch a shellcode, which, in turn, injects a beacon for the Viper red team tool.</p> <p>Available for download from GitHub, Viper is described as a "graphical intranet penetration tool, which modularizes and weaponizes the tactics and technologies commonly used in the process of Intranet penetration."</p> <p>The framework, similar to Cobalt Strike, is said to feature over 80 modules to facilitate initial access, persistence, privilege escalation, credential Access, lateral movement, and arbitrary command execution.</p> <p>"By observing Naikon APT's hacking arsenal, it was concluded that this group tends to conduct long-term intelligence and espionage operations, typical for a group that aims to conduct attacks on foreign governments and officials," the researchers pointed out.</p>

	"To avoid detection and maximize the result, it changed different [tactics, techniques, and procedures] and tools over time."
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HEADLINE	05/02 Black Basta link to Conti group?
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/new-black-basta-ransomware-possibly-linked-conti-group?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A new ransomware operation named Black Basta has targeted at least a dozen companies and some researchers believe there may be a connection to the notorious Conti group.</p> <p>The existence of Black Basta came to light in mid-April, but MalwareHunterTeam researchers spotted a sample apparently compiled in February.</p> <p>The cybercriminals behind Black Basta use malware to encrypt files on compromised systems, appending the .basta extension to encrypted files. In addition, like many other ransomware groups, they steal large amounts of information from victims in an effort to increase their chances of getting paid.</p> <p>Cybersecurity firm Minerva has conducted a technical analysis of the Black Basta ransomware and noted that the malware requires administrator privileges to work. The company's researchers discovered that the malware hijacks the Windows Fax service for persistence on the infected systems.</p> <p>The Black Basta group has listed roughly a dozen companies on its website, where it names victims that refuse to pay up. The list of victims includes the American Dental Association and German wind turbine giant Deutsche Windtechnik, which recently confirmed the breach, but claimed its wind turbines were never at risk.</p> <p>The hackers have published more than 100 Gb of data allegedly stolen from Deutsche Windtechnik.</p> <p>MalwareHunterTeam believes the "Black Basta ransomware gang must have something to do with Conti." This assumption is based on similarities between their leak sites, their payment sites, and the way their "support" employees talk and behave. Other researchers agree that there are similarities to the Conti operation.</p> <p>In the meantime, the Conti group continues announcing new targets, including government organizations in Peru and Costa Rica.</p> <p>In fact, Conti ransomware activity has surged in the past weeks, despite the cybercriminals' operations being exposed by a pro-Ukraine hacktivist.</p> <p>The hacktivist used a Twitter account named "ContiLeaks" to make available chat logs, credentials, email addresses, C&C server details and even source code from the Conti operations. The leaks came in response to the Conti group expressing its support for the Russian government in its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>While some believed the leaks could hurt Conti operations, Secureworks reported recently that the number of new victims added to Conti's website in March 2022 exceeded 70, significantly more than the average of 43 victims per month seen in 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 DOJ: DOD tricked; paid \$23.5M phishing
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-dod-tricked-into-paying-235-million-to-phishing-actor/?&web_view=true
GIST	The U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) has announced the conviction of Sercan Oyuntur, 40, resident of California, for multiple counts relating to a phishing operation that caused \$23.5 million in damages to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

The fraudster managed to divert to his personal bank account DoD funds destined for a jet fuel supplier.

After an eight-day trial in Camden, California, Oyuntur was found guilty of conspiracy to commit wire, mail, and bank fraud, unauthorized device access, aggravated identity theft, and making false statements to federal law enforcement officers.

Phishing operation

According to the [criminal complaint](#) against Oyuntur in 2019, the damage from the phishing fraud occurred in September 2018.

Oyuntur and his conspirators registered the domain "dia-mil.com", which is very similar to the legitimate "dla.mil, and used it to send phishing emails.

These emails were delivered to users of SAM (System for Award Management), which is a vendor database where companies that want to conduct business with the Federal Government register themselves.

The phishing messages contained links to a cloned "login.gov" website, where the victimized vendors entered their account details, unknowingly exposing them to Oyuntur.

In at least one confirmed case, Oyuntur logged onto one of the stolen accounts belonging to a corporation from Southeast Asia that had 11 active contracts of fuel provision for the United States military at the time.

One of them was a \$23,453,350 contract with a pending payment for the provision of 10,080,000 gallons of jet fuel to the U.S. DoD.

By logging in onto the SAM database as the victimized corporation, Oyuntur changed the registered banking information, replacing the foreign account with one that he controlled.

Attempting to overcome safeguards

At the time, DoD's EBS servers featured a security system that scanned the SAM database every 24 hours for bank account changes and blocked payments of outstanding invoices that met specific risk criteria.

The conspirators stumbled upon this problem following the bank account change and resorted to calling the DLA (Defense Logistics Agency), delivering false explanations, and requesting the manual approval of the financial information changes.

In October 2018, the payment went through. Oyuntur and his conspirators used falsified invoices of a dealership's car sales to forge a seemingly legitimate source for the hefty sum.

"As part of his participation in the scheme, Oyuntur worked closely with another conspirator, Hurriyet Arslan, who owned a used car dealership, Deal Automotive Sales, in Florence, New Jersey."

"Arslan opened a separate shell company based in New Jersey for use in the criminal scheme, obtained a cell phone number for the shell company, hired another person to pose as the shell company's owner, and opened a bank account in the name of the shell company" - the [U.S. Department of Justice](#)

However, the dealership used in the scheme wasn't a government contractor and wasn't registered on SAM, so the transaction was still a mismatch for the automated checking systems in place.

As a result, an investigation was launched, gradually uncovering all of the steps in the fraud, identifying one of Oyuntur's conspirators, Hurriyet Arslan, the owner of the car dealership, and reverting the transaction.

	<p>Arslan pleaded guilty to conspiracy, bank fraud, and money laundering in January 2020 and is scheduled to be sentenced this summer.</p> <p>Oyuntur faces a maximum potential penalty of 30 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$1,000,000 or twice the gross profits of loss resulting from his offenses. The date of the sentence has not been set yet.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Spain: PM, defense minister phones hacked
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/world/europe/spain-prime-minister-pegasus-spyware.html
GIST	<p>MADRID — Data was downloaded from cellphones used by the prime minister and the defense minister of Spain that were infected with powerful spyware known as Pegasus from an Israeli company, the country’s government said on Monday.</p> <p>The revelation that Pegasus reached the highest echelons of the Spanish government broadens a scandal over political spying in the country, after a cybersecurity watchdog organization found that Pegasus had been installed on the devices of dozens of politicians from the pro-independence government of Catalonia.</p> <p>Pegasus is a sophisticated and robust surveillance tool, and while it has been used by dozens of governments to hunt down criminals, terrorists and drug traffickers, the developments in Spain will add to concerns that there are insufficient checks to prevent its abuse.</p> <p>The hacking represented an “illegal and external” intrusion into Spanish politics, said Félix Bolaños, a minister in the Spanish government, at a news conference, adding that the use of the spyware attack was “alien” to any national agencies and had not received any kind of judicial authorization.</p> <p>Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Defense Minister Margarita Robles had their phones surveilled by the Pegasus spyware about a year ago, Mr. Bolaños said, and the Spanish authorities were trying to determine whether other ministers and senior officials were targeted.</p> <p>Mr. Bolaños said that the national court, which is charged with cases of terrorism and other serious crimes, would investigate how Pegasus was used to monitor Spanish officials.</p> <p>Pegasus is a software that was developed by NSO Group, an Israeli company, in part to help governments track criminal and terrorist activity. The software allows users to monitor every aspect of a target’s phone — including calls, messages, photos and video.</p> <p>But its usage has led to scandals in several countries, and last November the Biden administration blacklisted NSO Group, saying it had knowingly supplied spyware that has been used by foreign governments to target the phones of dissidents, human-rights activists, journalists and others.</p> <p>“While we have not seen any information related to this alleged misuse and we are not familiar with the details of this specific case,” NSO Group said in a statement Monday, “NSO’s firm stance on these issues is that the use of cyber tools in order to monitor politicians, dissidents, activists and journalists is a severe misuse of any technology and goes against the desired use of such critical tools.”</p> <p>The announcement from the government in Madrid adds a twist to the dispute over political spying in Spain, which was reignited with the revelations last month that Catalan officials had been monitored.</p> <p>Regional leaders demanded that the central government open an investigation into the usage of Pegasus against the Catalan politicians, including the region’s current leader, Pere Aragonès.</p> <p>“All political espionage is extremely serious,” Mr. Aragonès said in a statement on Twitter. “We have been denouncing it for days without obtaining explanations from the Spanish government. When mass espionage is against Catalan institutions and independence, silence and excuses. Today, everything is in a hurry.”</p>

The latest Catalan revelations was touched off by a report from Citizen Lab, a cybersecurity watchdog organization at the University of Toronto that has been investigating unlawful surveillance activities worldwide.

At the time, Citizen Lab also said it had found evidence of what it called “multiple suspected instances of Pegasus spyware infections within official U.K. networks,” including at the prime minister’s office and the Foreign Ministry.

In an emergency news conference, which was held on a public holiday in Madrid, government officials said that the prime minister’s phone was infected in May 2021, and that the defense minister’s device was hit a month later.

“These are facts and not suppositions,” Mr. Bolaños said. “We know that the Pegasus software has been used illicitly in 20 countries and that governments are among the victims.”

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	05/02 Election violence tracked back to Aug 2020
SOURCE	https://www.wral.com/feds-tracked-potential-for-election-violence-as-far-back-as-august-2020/20262155/
GIST	<p>CNN — Federal law enforcement tracked the potential for election-related violence as far back as August 2020, which is earlier than previously known, according to a government report released Monday.</p> <p>The Government Accountability Office said in its report that federal agencies had tracked the potential violence on social media and other websites. Furthermore, the agencies produced dozens of internal reports prior to the January 6, 2021, insurrection warning that protesters may seek to attack the US Capitol, use improvised weapons and potentially be armed.</p> <p>The GAO report and its accompanying timeline compare, for the first time, how law enforcement obtained and assessed a flood of social media posts detailing plans for violence, and they offer insight into how that information was shared among 10 federal and multiple state and local agencies.</p> <p>"All 10 selected agencies — including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis who have lead roles in countering domestic terrorism and violent extremism — were aware of open-source data about planned events on January 6, and seven were aware of potential violence planned for that day," the report said.</p> <p>Specific calls for violence</p> <p>The interactive timeline in the Monday report indicates that data was passed to the FBI from social media platform Parler that showed a user had posted, "We need to mass an armed force of American Patriots...to react to the congressional events of January 6th and follow what the Declaration of Independence has dictated us to do."</p> <p>Parler also alerted officials to another post on December 24, 2020, that said, "I'm trying to find [people who want to commit violence] on the 6th not just a peaceful [march]...is this where I should be looking?"</p> <p>According to the report, US Park Police obtained alarming information from a website from a far-right group called Patriot Action for America that showed organization members were "encouraged to amass 'a large enough force of American citizen patriots to, at all costs, prevent ... the inaugurat[ion]...' " The website also appeared to encourage members to detain Democratic politicians for "trial by military tribunal for high treason," the report said.</p>

The US Park Police developed a brief on December 28, 2020, identifying the "StopTheSteal" and other events planned for January 6, and noted that people had "concrete" plans to travel to DC to protest the counting of electoral votes, which could lead to violence.

Other examples of information obtained by the GAO include the Architect of the Capitol's identification of a Twitter post that indicated the far-right extremist group the Proud Boys planned to disable fire extinguishing systems in federal buildings, including the Capitol.

Several Proud Boys have been charged with conspiracy, including Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio. One Proud Boys leader, Charles Donohoe, pleaded guilty in April to conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding and assaulting an officer and could provide vital information to prosecutors about what the top members of the organization had planned for the attack.

The report noted the Senate sergeant-at-arms had received open-source data on December 29, 2020, from a local partner agency that highlighted a social media post encouraging Donald Trump supporters to march on the Capitol and intimidate members of Congress on January 6.

The report notes the FBI reviewed social media posts from November 3, 2020, through January 5, 2021, but officials told the GAO the review of these posts "did not reveal information specifically citing" the Capitol. However, the review did show there was one post related to the potential for violence in Washington on January 6.

More reports in the works

Federal officials from the FBI and DHS testified in 2021 that the agencies had never produced a formal threat warning to be shared among law enforcement partners for the joint session of Congress on January 6 -- decisions that were highlighted in a report last year from two Senate committees about the security failures.

The GAO report points out that several agencies, including the FBI and DHS, produced more than two dozen smaller reports known as "threat products" that focused on planned events for January 6, when the counting of the electoral votes took place.

One widely reported example is a January 5 FBI bulletin composed of raw intelligence and warning of discussions about a "war" on the Capitol.

Monday's report marked the fifth in a series from the GAO examining the Capitol attack. The next report will examine how agencies used threat-related information to prepare for the events of January 6.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Al-Qaida stronger, recentralizing?
SOURCE	https://themedialine.org/top-stories/11-years-later-al-qaida-is-stronger-on-its-way-to-recentralizing/
GIST	<p>The US withdrawal from Afghanistan paved the way for the Islamist group to regain a safe haven</p> <p>This week marks 11 years since the death of Osama bin Laden, the founder and leader of al-Qaida. On May 1, 2011, US President Barack Obama announced his death, slain during a US Navy SEAL raid in Pakistan, where the terrorist leader was hiding.</p> <p>Because of the time difference with the United States, bin Laden's death in Abbottabad, Pakistan, actually took place on May 2, shortly after 1 am local time.</p> <p>During bin Laden's time, the name al-Qaida often made it into the headlines and newsrooms due to spectacular attacks on Western targets.</p> <p>However, al-Qaida is still active today, currently in the process of shifting its operational system and expanding through the Middle East and many parts of Africa and Asia.</p>

Dr. Hans-Jakob Schindler, senior director of the Counter Extremism Project and former coordinator of the ISIL, al-Qaida, and Taliban Monitoring Team of the UN Security Council, told The Media Line that the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan last August has led to a significant change in al-Qaida's approach to its operations.

He explained that since bin Laden's death and with the rise of his successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaida became decentralized. At the same time, it has managed to expand through affiliates, stepping back from centralized, large-scale terrorist operations against the West, and concentrating on creating a broader base in Islamic countries.

Now, for the first time in 20 years, al-Qaida has a safe haven, and the consequences of that are starting to manifest themselves, Schindler said.

In time, al-Qaida may reach a point where it continues to have affiliates around the world to attack its "near enemies" in the Islamic world, but it will no longer exercise restraint in attacking its "far enemies" based in Europe and the US because it again has a protected area in Afghanistan, protected by the Taliban, he explained.

"You don't need thousands of individuals. You need a handful to organize a spectacular terror attack," Schindler said.

"For the first time since 2001 al-Qaida is again in a position again to do, and to do it even better than it did it before 2001 because it no longer needs to train all these fighters for the Taliban because the Taliban does not have to fight the Northern Alliance [in northeastern Afghanistan]. Al-Qaida can now concentrate again on just training the terrorism elite," he added.

When bin Laden led al-Qaida, he kept the membership small.

After the group was kicked out of Afghanistan by the US-led invasion that began in late 2001, many of the small, elite group of al-Qaida fighters returned to their home countries where they opened affiliate groups, Schindler noted.

He added that bin Laden was never really clear about his opinion on that. But he refused al-Shabab's pledge of allegiance several times, despite the Somalia-based al-Qaida ideology group's tremendous power.

After bin Laden's death, Zawahiri accepted al-Shabab's and many other groups' pledges of allegiance.

Daniele Garofalo, an analyst of jihadist terrorism, explained that today al-Qaida is strongly decentralized.

Its affiliates are "very independent, propaganda is less frequent and, above all, al-Qaida conducts a low profile operation, which tries to strike mainly security and military forces," he told The Media Line.

Dr. Francisco Jorge Gonçalves, from the Research Centre of the Institute of Political Studies at the Catholic University of Portugal, added in an interview with The Media Line that although "al-Qaida Central" is the group's hub, the real power lies in its branches and affiliates, and their capacity to initiate terrorist attacks and attract recruits.

"After all, the al-Qaida ideology is very alive," he said.

This is how it has been since the death of bin Laden. However, the renewed base in Afghanistan may change all that.

Garofalo suggested that as long as the Taliban is in power in Afghanistan, al-Qaida will have a safe haven.

	<p>“The Taliban will never remove al-Qaida from Afghanistan; at the most, they will ask it never to operate in the country, but to use it only as a safe haven. I say this because the 20-year relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaida is now generational and familial, a relationship that neither of them wants to give up,” he said.</p> <p>Schindler highlighted a strong indication that al-Qaida’s renewed security may lead to its recentralization and to it once again planning “spectacular attacks” against Western targets.</p> <p>During 2019 and 2020, Zawahiri made no public statements and didn’t release a single video, causing many to believe he had died.</p> <p>However, in the past year, Zawahiri has posted four videos, which in Schindler’s opinion is a consequence of him feeling much more secure than before.</p> <p>“He is trying to project an image of power, including to the rival terrorist groups like ISIS/ISIL,” said Gonçalves.</p> <p>Zawahiri’s role until now was to “stay alive” in order to be the symbol of the ideology to which al-Qaida affiliates spread across the globe pledged allegiance, explained Schindler.</p> <p>Now, Zawahiri is very active. The frequency and openness of his appearances “could mean that he is shifting to a more active role. He may actually now actively work in the role that bin Laden had, with planning centralized, training centralized, going back to 20 years ago. He is shifting to be the active leader of the network,” Schindler said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/03 UN: terror attacks Sahel region continue
SOURCE	https://newsaf.cgtn.com/news/2022-05-03/UN-chief-says-terrorist-attacks-in-Sahel-region-continue-to-increase--19/ASKA5ENG/index.html
GIST	<p>The number of terrorist attacks in the Sahel region "continues to increase" according to the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, who is on a three-state visit of West Africa.</p> <p>Guterres made the remarks in the Niger's capital, Niamey, after a meeting with President Mohamed Bazoum.</p> <p>He noted that the "international community must realize" that terrorism is "not just a regional or African issue, but one that threatens the whole world."</p> <p>He reiterated calls for more resources to tackle the problem saying that "peace, stability and prosperity in Niger and across the Sahel remains an absolute priority for the United Nations."</p> <p>Meanwhile, the former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, agreed to a request from the African Union Chairperson and the UN chief, to lead an African Union (AU)-UN Joint Strategic Assessment on security in the Sahel, focusing on developing recommendations on how to strengthen the overall international response to the security crisis in the region.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 What extremism means to federal govt.
SOURCE	https://www.lawfareblog.com/what-extremism-means-federal-government
GIST	<p>The federal government lacks a public definition of “extremism.” But the Justice Department uses the term “violent extremism” to categorize various terrorism threats, and the Defense Department prohibits service members from active participation in so-called extremist activities. In both examples, the government uses modifiers to restrict the meaning of “extremism” or “extremist” in a specific context. In this respect, “violent” and “activities” serve similar functions. Distinctions in how the terms operate in practice,</p>

however, speak to the challenges of defining extremism and developing extremism-related policies within the federal government.

Neither Congress nor the executive branch has an official definition of extremism, but the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as “the holding of extreme political or religious views.” That in turn requires a definition of “extreme” views, which is often left up to interpretation.

These definitions raise important considerations. First, extremism does not require conduct. An extremist might believe that violence is justified for political ends. But seeking those ends, whether through violence or otherwise unlawful conduct, is not what makes them extremists. Second, the term “extremism” is relative, if not normative. An allegation of extremism requires the definition of the norm and the assertion that someone’s views deviate from the norm.

In this respect, “extremism” is fickle than even “terrorism,” which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as “the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.” Each term’s definition involves politics. But the similarities end there. For one, terrorism requires conduct. To be a terrorist, one must act. To be an extremist, however, one need only think. Furthermore, terrorism is unlawful. Therefore, even when extremism crosses the line from belief into expression or conduct, it may still be distinct from terrorism. For example, white supremacist hate speech or a neo-Nazi march may be labeled as extremist, but neither is necessarily illegal.

These considerations make it challenging to develop federal definitions of extremism and extremism-related policies. The federal government cannot set the parameters for acceptable public discourse, nor should it. This makes defining extremism a sensitive task, which in turn makes it hard to develop responsive policies. Moreover, to the extent that extremism involves conduct, speech, or beliefs protected under the First Amendment, the federal government generally lacks power to criminalize or regulate extremism.

In the few instances in which the government has come close to defining or developing policies on extremism, these constraints are made apparent. The Justice Department, for example, [uses the term](#) “violent extremism” to categorize different terrorist threats. In this context, violent extremism is “the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence” to advance an ideological agenda. Among the Justice Department’s terrorism classifications, for example, are racially motivated violent extremism, anarchist violent extremism and abortion-related violent extremism.

Additionally, the Pentagon has [published guidance](#) prohibiting service members from active participation in so-called extremist activities, which include “[a]dvocating ... unlawful force or violence to achieve [ideological] goals” and “[a]dvocating widespread unlawful discrimination based on” protected characteristics.

In both examples, the government adds modifiers that not only restrict the meaning of extremism but also provide a basis for the government to get involved. The Justice Department cannot investigate or prosecute extremism, but it does have jurisdiction over certain forms of violence, including terrorism. And though the Defense Department must respect the First Amendment rights of service members, it can regulate activities that threaten morale, reduce readiness or erode public trust.

Despite these similarities, there are important distinctions between the Justice Department’s use of “violent extremism” and the Defense Department’s use of “extremist activities.”

The first is context—in particular, the scope of government power within that context. In a civilian context, the federal government generally cannot prohibit activities protected under the First Amendment. But [according to](#) the Supreme Court, “the different character of the military community and the military mission requires a different application of [First Amendment] protections”—and one more deferential to the government.

This explains why FBI Director Christopher Wray has stressed in [multiple congressional hearings](#) that “we, the FBI, don’t investigate ideology, no matter how repugnant. We investigate violence.” Likewise, the Biden administration [has explained](#) that it uses “violent extremism” instead of “extremism” to categorize terrorism threats “because mere advocacy of political or social positions, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics ... may be constitutionally protected.” Inherent in the administration’s statement is a concession that, in a civilian context, the government generally cannot investigate, prosecute or otherwise prohibit extremism.

But advocating violence and supporting unlawful conduct are precisely the kinds of “extremist activities” that are prohibited among service members. [According to](#) the Defense Department, “[e]xtremist activities are inconsistent with the responsibilities and obligations of military service, as well as the oaths of office and enlistment, and can be prohibited even in some circumstances in which such activities would be constitutionally protected in a civilian setting.” In short, the federal government has more power to regulate extremism among service members than within the civilian population. But even then, the government must draw lines between mere belief, for example, and conduct or expression.

The second distinction is in how the government addresses extremism in the justice system and the military.

Just because “violent” and “activities” serve similar functions by providing a basis for the government to get involved, it does not mean that the government’s orientation toward extremism in each context is the same. Perhaps the government uses “extremism” or “extremist” for no reason other than to describe the particular forms of violence and activities that it’s concerned about. Or perhaps the government’s principal focus is monitoring or preventing extremism—including the protected kind—and the modifiers serve as a constitutional stalking horse.

Despite the FBI’s [track record](#) of domestic spying, the Justice Department is likely not using “violence” to get at extremism but, rather, is using “extremism” to categorize violence. In contrast, it’s reasonable to assume the opposite is true when it comes to the Defense Department’s use of “extremist activities.” If the government’s leading concerns in this context are morale and combat readiness—and [official guidance](#) suggests they are—then extremism itself, and not just participation in so-called extremist activities, appears to pose a threat. After all, even if service members do not act on their white supremacist beliefs by advocating racial violence, those beliefs could nevertheless inspire actions that could have less explicit, though equally serious, consequences for unit cohesion and the broader mission.

In short, it’s plausible that the Defense Department uses “activities” to get at extremism, which is different from the Justice Department’s use of “extremism” to categorize violence. Indeed, this dynamic can be seen at work in the Defense Department’s treatment of membership in extremist groups. The Pentagon’s official guidance [falls short](#) of prohibiting membership in the Ku Klux Klan, the Oath Keepers, and the like, but as the Defense Department [has noted](#), the various restrictions on participation in extremist activities all but prevent membership in practice, if not in text.

These two examples demonstrate both the challenges and the constraints that federal officials must navigate when developing policies on extremism. And defining the term remains difficult. Unless braced with modifiers, “extremism” is a vague, malleable word, surpassing even the entanglements of “terrorism.” This pliability might be useful to the federal government—or it might cause confusion. After all, and as mentioned above, federal officials have repeatedly emphasized before Congress that, when it comes to violent extremism, the focus is violence, not extremism. But if members of Congress needed clarification, who could blame them?

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HEADLINE	05/02 Afghanistan meth drug trade flourishes
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/afghanistan-meth-opium-drug-industry/?itid=hp-top-table-main

BAKWA, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's fastest-growing drug industry operates from desert outposts in plain view.

One of its most bustling hubs, some five hours west of Kandahar, can only be reached by miles of dirt tracks that lead to a row of dusty shops topped with Taliban flags. Wholesalers like Abdulwadood work openly here, moving dozens of kilos of methamphetamine every week.

In the middle of his crowded shop, he casually tosses a half-kilo bag of long glassy shards onto the carpet. Its street value in Europe is tens of thousands of dollars. Abdulwadood will sell it for about \$250.

"Every year, sales and production just increase and increase," he said, speaking on the condition that only his first name be used to discuss the illicit drug industry. Behind him the rest of his stock was piled in a corner. He expected to sell the roughly 20 kilos of shisha — the Afghan term for meth — in just a few days.

For decades, the country has been a global hub for opium production, estimated to supply 80 percent of the world's opiate users. Now its meth industry is growing at breakneck speed, stoking fears among Western experts and officials that, under the Taliban, Afghanistan could become a major supplier as demand rises globally.

Hundreds of meth labs have appeared in Afghanistan over the past six years, according to independent experts, former government officials and drug traders. And more are being built each month as the country's economic crisis forces Afghans to find new sources of income. The vast majority of meth produced is for export, but an increasing number of Afghans are turning to it as their drug of choice.

The sudden boom in meth production came after drug traffickers discovered a potential bonanza in a native plant called ephedra — known here as oman — which grows wild and is a natural source of the drug's key ingredient.

"These labs have been extremely busy these last few months, as a consequence of the sheer amount of ephedra that passed through," said David Mansfield, an expert on Afghanistan's illicit economy who has produced reports for the World Bank and European Commission, drawing from on-the-ground investigators, aerial imagery and other sources.

Sellers at the meth bazaar in rural western Afghanistan have long been free to ply their trade. The previous government largely turned a blind eye, said Abdulwadood, and the Taliban have taken the same approach since coming to power. Though Taliban fighters sometimes inspect the market, they have not tried to shut it down.

"The only reason we are in this business is because there are no other jobs," Abdulwadood said. "Of course, if the economy gets worse, more people will start producing shisha."

The Taliban issued its first formal ban on the growing, production and distribution of illicit drugs several weeks ago. Yet there is widespread skepticism that the new leadership will eliminate a source of hard cash at a time when the country is almost entirely cut off from the global financial system.

"A significant part of the Taliban's revenue comes from taxing illicit commodities, and drugs is one of those," said Andrew Cunningham, who heads the drug markets, crime and supply reduction branch at the E.U.'s European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

"It's impossible to provide even the most basic of services unless there's money coming into the government coffers," Cunningham noted. "So, for them to do something about a drug trade that creates some of those revenues is something we see as quite unlikely, at least at present."

The country's new deputy minister for counternarcotics insists otherwise. Before taking control, Abdul Haq Hamkar said in an interview, the Taliban did not have the resources to stop the drug trade as well as

fight U.S. and Afghan government forces. (According to a [United Nations](#) study, money from the opium trade helped fund that fight, generating up to \$113 million in annual tax revenue for the Taliban and its allies in 2019 alone.)

“Let me be clear that from now on,” Hamkar said, “no one in any part of the country will be allowed to cultivate or produce either opium, or heroin, or hashish, or opium.”

Following the opium route

During nearly 20 years of war, U.S.- and NATO-led efforts to eradicate opium production in Afghanistan were found to be some of the least effective and most wasteful operations, according to a [number of internal reports](#), including by the [independent U.S. watchdog](#), the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

Many opium exporters are now moving meth, using existing infrastructure, routes and bribery schemes to reach neighboring Iran and Pakistan.

“They use the same trucks and the same routes,” said a businessman at the bazaar in Bakwa about the men who come to collect his product. He spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the trade.

Cooking meth with harvested ephedra in Afghanistan — while labor-intensive and dangerous — costs a fraction of the price as making the same drug with ephedra extracted from pharmaceuticals, the process used to produce the vast majority of the world’s meth.

Afghan meth once struggled to compete globally. “But then all this ephedra was discovered, growing wild in the mountains,” said Sara Hakimi, a former Foreign Ministry official specializing in counternarcotics. “You could just take it, dry it and sell it.”

Seizures of meth here reflect the lucrative shift: Between 2018 and 2019, [U.N. data](#) shows they increased over 600 percent.

Drug enforcement agencies in Europe fear cut-rate Afghan meth could flood their capitals given the drug’s growing popularity, Cunningham said: “We’re quite concerned in Europe, because crystal meth, like heroin and crack, is one of the really harmful drugs that you especially want to avoid.”

A homegrown addiction crisis

Afghanistan’s meth production was on the rise even before the collapse of the U.S.-backed government last August.

Ghousaddin is a farmer in western Afghanistan, in the same stretch of desert as the Bakwa bazaar. In 2019, he was approached by Iranian businessmen about building a meth lab on the edge of his fields. The men offered to teach him the process and provide the needed chemicals and the dried ephedra plant in exchange for a large cut of his profits. Years of little rainfall had left him struggling to support his family. So he agreed.

His makeshift lab consists of a simple grain thresher beside a row of mud sheds. After the ephedra is ground and sifted into a fine dust, it’s mixed in waist-high vats of chemicals before being boiled down over an open flame, laid out to dry in the sun, then mixed with another chemical compound that changes the white powder into glasslike crystals.

Ghousaddin’s income from meth has allowed him to keep food on the table and save for his sons’ future marriages. He believes there was no other way to survive. “Even poppy wouldn’t grow here,” he said, kicking at the dusty earth.

The amount of raw materials sent to him increases every year, as more and more people are drawn to harvesting ephedra.

“Everyone was up in the mountains for the ephedra harvest in August and September — ex-army people, ex-police, everyone — because it is the only source of income in some of these highland areas,” said Mansfield, the expert on Afghanistan’s illicit economy.

Money from drug production may help some families endure difficult economic times, but the methamphetamine surge ultimately means more hardship for the Afghan people.

The country already had some of the highest rates of opiate addiction in the world, according to the latest [U.N. data](#).

Many addicts use openly in central Kabul, in narrow median strips along busy streets or in alleyways. But the main place to buy and use drugs is in the city’s west, beneath a bridge in a dried-out riverbed.

When the Taliban took power, they cleared hundreds of people from the area. The users and dealers eventually returned, and today doctors at Afghan drug treatment centers say their overwhelmed facilities are receiving more and more meth patients.

Kabul’s largest rehab center is a cluster of stark warehouselike buildings. The facility is caring for nearly twice as many people as it was designed to treat. Doctors often run out of the medication needed to help addicts detox.

Jamal Abdulnai Nasiri, 60, has worked in drug rehabilitation for more than two decades. “We probably receive three times as many meth addicts now than three years ago,” he said. “We are doing our best with what we have.”

A few dozen patients, rail-thin from years of drug abuse, loitered outside after lunch. They began telling their stories.

Muhammad Faqiri said he started using meth after he lost his job as a translator for U.S.-led forces and began driving a taxi in Kabul to support his family.

“I noticed my friend was smoking this thing that allowed him to drive really fast,” he said. Initially, meth helped Faqiri work long hours, but addiction cost him his job. Then his family kicked him out.

“I just want to go home,” he said.

Nasiri consoled him, telling him he would be free to leave soon. Once out of earshot, though, the doctor lamented that those discharged rarely remain away for long.

“Almost all of them,” he said, “return over and over.”

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HEADLINE	05/02 Taliban supreme leader hails ‘victory’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/2/reclusive-taliban-supreme-leader-hails-victory-spe/
GIST	<p>The Taliban’s reclusive supreme leader in Afghanistan hailed the militant Islamist group’s “victory” and successful takeover of the war-torn country from a U.S.-backed government in a rare public speech over the weekend, roughly eight months after full withdrawal of the last American and allied troops left the country.</p> <p>“Congratulations on this victory, freedom and success,” Hibatullah Akhundzada told thousands of worshipers gathered Sunday to mark the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.</p> <p>A Voice of America report on the speech said it took place at the central mosque in Kandahar, Afghanistan’s second-largest city, which is known as the Taliban’s birthplace and de facto power center.</p>

	<p>The Taliban appointed Mr. Akhundzada as the group's supreme leader in 2016 after a U.S. drone strike had killed his predecessor, Mullah Mansour Akhtar. Agence-France Presse has reported that the new Taliban chief at one point secured a pledge of loyalty from al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who called him "the emir of the faithful."</p> <p>Mr. Akhundzada rarely appears in public. Sunday's speech in Kandahar was his first before a large audience since the Taliban took control of cities across Afghanistan following the full withdrawal of American forces last August after a 20-year-long U.S. occupation of the country.</p> <p>Voice of America (VOA) reported that Taliban security operatives confined journalists, including the crew of the official Afghan television, to a corner of the mosque where the Taliban head was speaking on Sunday and did not allow reporters to approach the supreme leader.</p> <p>An eyewitness told VOA, a U.S. government-backed news organization, that the compound was heavily guarded, with machine-gun positions on the roof of the mosque around the dome and under construction towers next to the building.</p> <p>A large number of Taliban soldiers were deployed in and outside of the house of worship and Russian-made MI-17 helicopters and a Cessna aircraft hovered over the mosque when Mr. Akhundzada was delivering his speech, VOA reported.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/01 Ukraine: 'Ghost of Kyiv' is myth
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/01/world/europe/ghost-kyiv-ukraine-myth.html
GIST	<p>He shot down numerous Russian planes, survived enemy attacks and became a symbol of Ukraine's surprisingly effective air defenses, earning a bold wartime moniker: The Ghost of Kyiv.</p> <p>He is also, it turns out, a myth.</p> <p>"The ghost of Kyiv is a superhero-legend, whose character was created by Ukrainians!" Ukraine's Air Force Command wrote on Facebook on Saturday, dispelling a monthslong rumor — fueled by Ukrainian authorities themselves — that had invigorated the resistance to Russia's invasion.</p> <p>The Ukrainian statement came after some news outlets, including the Times of London, identified the Ghost of Kyiv as Major Stepan Tarabalka, an actual 29-year-old who died in an air battle in March. The claim echoed across social media and tabloid publications in Ukraine and the West, seeming to confirm that the story of the heroic fighter was real.</p> <p>Instead, it has turned out to be one of the more successful pieces of propaganda in an information war that, at times, Ukraine has fought as fiercely as it has on the battlefield.</p> <p>It was only a day after the beginning of Russia's invasion that the Ukrainian media started reporting that an unknown pilot of a MIG-29 fighter jet had downed six enemy planes in 30 hours. Memes and illustrations started circulating online with the hashtag #ghostofkyiv, collecting hundreds of millions of views.</p> <p>Even a former president of Ukraine, Petro O. Poroshenko, tweeted a picture of a pilot who he said was the Ghost of Kyiv and who had "six victories over Russian pilots!"</p> <p>"With such powerful defenders, Ukraine will definitely win!" Mr. Poroshenko wrote. (The photo, it turned out, was from a 2019 Twitter post by the Ukrainian Defense Ministry.)</p>

The Ukrainian government also joined in. On Feb. 27 it relayed on Twitter the story and the photo, calling the unknown pilot “a nightmare for invading Russian aircrafts.” It posted a video praising the pilot that included a clip from a combat flight simulator.

Around the same time, when the Ukrainian Defense Ministry announced on Facebook that dozens of discharged military pilots were returning to the Air Force, it referred to the fascination with the anonymous pilot: “Who knows, maybe one of them is the air avenger on the MIG-29.”

The stories proliferated and overlapped. After reports in early March that the Ghost of Kyiv had been shot down, Ihor Mosiychuk, a former Ukrainian lawmaker, reported that the pilot survived, went back to his base, took off in another jet and downed another enemy plane.

“The ghost is alive!” he wrote on Facebook. The Kyiv Post reported that he had destroyed as many as 49 planes.

Skepticism spread in some quarters. But the legend only grew. Artists produced NFTs, or nonfungible tokens, with the pilot’s image. Blue and gold “Ghost of Kyiv” fliers and illustrations circulated online.

On Friday, several publications identified the pilot as Mr. Tarabalka, an airman who died in battle on Mar. 13 and was posthumously awarded the military honor “Hero of Ukraine.” The Times of London also quoted Ukrainian sources as saying the pilot’s helmet and goggles were expected to go on sale at an auction in London.

The next day, the Air Force Command of Ukraine’s Armed Forces debunked the claims. “Hero of Ukraine Stepan Tarabalka is NOT ‘Ghost of Kyiv’ and he did NOT shoot down 40 planes,” it wrote on Facebook. But they still worked to keep the myth going.

“The #GhostOfKyiv is alive,” the Air Force wrote on Twitter. “It embodies the collective spirit of the highly qualified pilots of the Tactical Aviation Brigade who are successfully defending #Kyiv and the region.”

For many Ukrainians, that was all that mattered.

“He IS a legend,” Lesia Vasylenko, a Ukrainian lawmaker, wrote on Twitter, “He can’t be killed — he is a ghost.”

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HEADLINE	05/02 Auditor: payroll fraud probe in Tacoma PD
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3456634/fraud-investigation-tacoma-police-departments-payroll-system/
GIST	<p>The Office of the Washington State Auditor has identified payroll discrepancies in the Tacoma Police Department and recommends that the City of Tacoma seek financial recovery from the officer attached to the investigation.</p> <p>The auditor found that lieutenant LeRoy Standifer recorded hundreds of hours worked while on leave. The lieutenant retired in November of 2020.</p> <p>The discrepancy was noticed during an internal audit of the department in which sergeants were recording acting lieutenant pay while covering for Standifer, shifts already marked as time worked by the lieutenant.</p> <p>Payroll misappropriations total \$21,499 and occurred between February 2018 and June 2020.</p> <p>The Washington State Patrol corroborated the state auditor’s investigation. The case has been referred to the Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.</p>

	<p>The findings have prompted a number of payroll and oversight reforms within the Tacoma Police Department, according to the audit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and review biweekly payroll report to identify time coded as Acting Sergeant/Lieutenant. • Review biweekly timecard submissions to ensure upgrade slips include the name of the Sergeant/Lieutenant who is out on leave. • Review biweekly timecard submissions to ensure Sergeants/Lieutenants out on leave have the appropriate leave time coded on their timecard. • Send out reminder memo detailing the timecard process when working in an acting capacity. • Send out reminder memo on an annual basis on how to review timecard submission to ensure time is being recorded correctly. • On an annual basis will conduct a random review process for timecard upgrade to ensure time was coded correctly.
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HEADLINE	05/02 How to stop speeding drivers? Scare them
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/nyregion/nyc-speeding-traffic-deaths.html
GIST	<p>A new billboard in East New York shows a pedestrian thrown into the air after bouncing off the front of a car, as his coffee splashes everywhere. “Speeding ruins lives,” it says. “Slow down.”</p> <p>The goal of the campaign is to scare speeding drivers in this Brooklyn neighborhood, where 35 people have been killed in traffic crashes since 2017.</p> <p>It is part of New York City’s latest effort to battle rampant speeding, which has turned neighborhood streets into raceways and propelled traffic deaths to the highest level in eight years.</p> <p>“It’s getting out of control — every day cars are speeding,” said William Candelario, 64, whose auto repair shop in the neighborhood was slammed into by a van last year.</p> <p>On Monday, the city’s transportation commissioner, Ydanis Rodríguez, will unveil a new safety campaign in three dozen neighborhoods like East New York, where traffic fatalities and injuries are among the highest in the city.</p> <p>Targeted areas include Bushwick and Canarsie in Brooklyn, Jamaica in Queens, Harlem and Washington Heights in Manhattan and Hunts Point in the South Bronx. City officials said these neighborhoods were selected based on elevated crash data.</p> <p>“We have seen just too many people dying on our streets, with crashes disproportionately concentrated in certain New York City communities,” Mr. Rodríguez said.</p> <p>The campaign will feature 18 high-profile billboards along high-crash roads and highways, as well as posters on the back end of public buses and at gas station pumps. City workers will be dispatched to hand out postcards, brochures and fliers.</p> <p>In New York City, traffic deaths have risen to 64 this year through April 26, from 61 for the same period last year — largely because of a spike in deaths among drivers and passengers, which nearly doubled to 23 this year from 13 last year.</p> <p>Pedestrian deaths — though still the largest share of traffic deaths — fell to 30 this year from 39 last year.</p>

Two cyclists were also killed, the same as last year, as well as four riders of motorized devices, which was two more than the year before, amid a [pandemic boom in cycling](#) and [electric bikes, scooters and skateboards](#).

Just over one-quarter of the 64 deaths this year were on highways — including three deaths each on Henry Hudson Parkway and Grand Central Parkway — while the rest were on local streets throughout the city.

The traffic deaths have [reversed some of the hard-won gains](#) of the city's eight-year-old transportation policy, called Vision Zero, which once aimed to eliminate all traffic deaths and had become a national model. Under the policy, the city won state approval to lower the speed limit to 25 m.p.h. from 30 m.p.h. on most streets, built a [sprawling network of nearly 2,000 automated speed cameras](#), and redesigned many streets to make them safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Mayor Eric Adams, who took office in January, has promised to expand on Vision Zero efforts. He recently pledged [\\$904 million to the city's streets plan](#) over the next five years, which will include redesigning dangerous intersections and adding more protected bike lanes and pedestrian areas. He has said police officials will also increase enforcement of traffic laws.

In addition, city officials are lobbying state lawmakers for local control of city streets, which would give them authority to set speed limits, expand red light cameras, and extend hours for speed cameras in school zones to nights and weekends — when the cameras are off and speeding has soared. “The city needs to be able to control its own destiny, so that we can quickly make changes that meet the current crisis,” Mr. Rodríguez said.

The new billboard and media campaign, which will cost \$4 million, aims to reinforce those other traffic safety efforts by trying to change driver behavior.

“This is a crisis and we need to use every tool possible to make our streets safer,” said Danny Harris, the executive director of Transportation Alternatives, an advocacy group, which has pushed the city to address the traffic violence.

There has been an [epidemic of speeding](#) and reckless driving around the country during the pandemic in part as some drivers have become emboldened by emptier roads and lax police enforcement, according to transportation experts. New York City has also seen a rise in car ownership as many people have avoided public transit.

Even before the pandemic, a growing number of cities sought to lower speed limits and design safer roads over concerns that higher speeds and larger vehicles like S.U.V.s led to more severe injuries and fatalities.

“The risk of death exponentially increases as speed increases,” said Alex Engel, a spokesman for the National Association of City Transportation Officials. “This is especially important as the vehicles on the streets have gotten larger.”

The eight-week, citywide campaign will also include [television ads](#) showing a pedestrian or cyclist being thrown backward in slow motion. And it will target drivers on social media, based on their online searches, and run in certain print publications.

Erick Guerra, an associate professor of city and regional planning at the University of Pennsylvania, said that while media campaigns are important, they do not have the same immediate effect on slowing down drivers as, say, expanding the use of automated speed cameras. “I think it takes a long time to change a culture of driving in the same way it took a long way to change a culture of smoking,” he said.

Some transportation advocates have called on cities to focus more on redesigning dangerous streets, saying that it is not enough to come into a neighborhood and tell drivers not to speed when its streets were essentially built to move traffic as fast as possible.

	<p>“It’s a vicious cycle,” said Leah Shahum, the executive director of the Vision Zero Network, a non-profit campaign. “Why is there speeding here? It’s because of the environment we built.”</p> <p>In East New York, the billboard there will be seen by drivers going through a particularly dangerous intersection at Atlantic and Pennsylvania Avenues, where 167 people — including 154 motor vehicle occupants — were injured in crashes from 2015 to 2019, according to the latest data available.</p> <p>Laura Remigio, 35, a makeup artist and stylist who said she was almost hit by a car while visiting a client in East New York, said that drivers go too fast and have cut her off in the crosswalk. “It’s supposed to be people first and the cars wait — and they don’t wait,” she said. “I’m running because the cars don’t stop.”</p> <p>But Ian Johnson, 67, a driver from New Jersey, said that some pedestrians also need to pay more attention. He said he often has to honk at people who don’t look as they cross or are on their phones “when they almost walk into my vehicle.”</p> <p>Mr. Candelario, whose auto repair shop is steps away from the billboard, said he hoped the billboard would finally get the attention of drivers.</p> <p>“It’s an eye opener and it makes you think,” he said. “You’ve got to be hard. You’ve got to put a little fear in it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Human remains found in barrel Lake Mead
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/human-remains-found-in-barrel-as-lake-mead-drops-to-historic-low-amid-drought/
GIST	<p>A barrel containing human remains was discovered in Nevada’s Lake Mead over the weekend as a historic drought grips the West.</p> <p>Las Vegas Metro Police fear they will find more bodies, officials told a local news station.</p> <p>The receding waters at Lake Mead, the country’s largest human-made reservoir, have dropped to historic lows. The levels are so shallow that a barrel containing skeletal remains was found Sunday immersed in mud, reports KLAS-TV in Las Vegas.</p> <p>Based on personal items found in the barrel, police think it has been at the bottom of the lake since the 1980s.</p> <p>Lt. Ray Spencer with the Las Vegas Metro Police told the news station the person was likely killed four decades ago and was found around 3 p.m. Sunday by boaters. He did not give further details about the person’s identity or how the remains ended up in a barrel at the bottom of Lake Mead.</p> <p>“It’s going to take an extensive amount of work,” Spencer said of trying to identify the person. “I would say there is a very good chance as the water level drops that we are going to find additional human remains.”</p> <p>The lake — a lifeline for 25 million people and millions of acres of farmland in California, Arizona, Nevada and Mexico — has been tipping toward crisis amid record temperatures and lower snowpack melt. The lake’s growing “bathtub ring,” formed by mineral deposits, marks the rocky desert slopes more than 150 feet above the retreating shoreline.</p> <p>“I think anybody can understand there are probably more bodies that have been dumped in Lake Mead, it’s just a matter of, are we able to recover those?” Spencer said.</p> <p>A photo of the skeleton in a partially exposed barrel was shared with the news station. An official with the Clark County Coroner’s Office said the department could not comment on the investigation. Police said</p>

	<p>they would reach out to outside experts, including at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to help identify the remains.</p> <p>Last month, water levels at Lake Mead dropped so low that an original water valve not seen since 1971 was exposed. The Southern Nevada Water Authority told CNN that the valve could no longer draw water because of the low water levels.</p> <p>“The Colorado River Basin is experiencing the worst drought in recorded history,” the water agency said in a statement posted to its website. “Since 2000, snowfall and runoff into the basin have been well below normal. These conditions have resulted in significant water level declines at major system reservoirs, including Lake Mead and Lake Powell.”</p> <p>The worsening megadrought is causing water districts to restrict usage. In California, roughly 6 million people will need to curb their water use by 35%. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California says this will equal about 80 gallons per day per person.</p> <p>“The ballpark figure we’re looking at is getting to the consumption of about 80 gallons per person per day,” said Adel Hagekhalil, the district’s general manager. “We’re trying to preserve everything we can.”</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	05/03 Bolivia: inmates cut jail time by reading
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/pages-pardons-bolivia-inmates-can-cut-jail-time-by-reading-2022-05-03/
GIST	<p>LA PAZ, May 3 (Reuters) - Inmates in Bolivia's overcrowded prisons are now able to reduce their jail time by reading books in a new program influenced by one in Brazil that aims to spread literacy and give hope despite a notoriously slow judicial process.</p> <p>The state program "Books behind bars" offers detainees a chance get out of jail days or weeks in advance of their release date. Bolivia does not have a life sentence or death penalty, but pre-trial detention can last for many years due to a slow judicial system.</p> <p>The program has been launched in 47 prisons that do not have resources to pay for education, reintegration or social assistance programs for prisoners, the Andean country's Ombudsman's Office says.</p> <p>So far, 865 inmates are sifting through prose, improving their reading and writing skills. One of them is Jaqueline, who has already read eight books in a year and has passed four reading tests.</p> <p>"It is really hard for people like us who have no income and who do not have family outside," she said. "There are people here, for example, who are just learning how to read and write."</p> <p>Nadia Cruz with the Ombudsman's office said the intention is to encourage inmates awaiting trial.</p> <p>"That is important because what is reduced (on the sentences) is relatively little, it is hours or days in some cases, depending on what the board decides," she told Reuters.</p> <p>With a daily salary of 8 bolivianos (\$1.18), incarcerated Bolivians are forced to work to be able to eat and pay the high court costs to be released.</p> <p>The country's prisons and jails have long suffered from overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, with some detainees staging protests over the lack of health care, according to Human Rights Watch.</p>

	Amid these difficulties, learning to read can be like escaping the prison walls, at least in the mind, said Mildred, an inmate at the Obrajes women's prison in the highland city of La Paz.
	"When I read, I am in contact with the whole universe. The walls and bars disappear," she said.
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HEADLINE	05/03 Attacks against police, law enforcement
SOURCE	https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2022-may-3/
GIST	<p>Bottom Line Up Front</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2021, there was a 59% increase since 2020 in the number of U.S. police officers murdered on duty, with 73 officers intentionally killed. • More than 55 police officers were killed by guns in 2021, a significant increase from previous years. • Death by gunfire plagues American society, with 45,222 people killed in 2020 (including homicide, suicide, and accidental). • In 2021, Americans bought 19.9 million guns; in 2020, they bought 22.8 million. <p>On average in 2021, an on-duty police officer was murdered every five days in the United States, with a total of 73 officers intentionally killed by perpetrators last year. This number represents a 59% increase from 2020. The total is the highest since 2001, a year that included the police officers killed in the September 11 terrorist attacks in which 72 officers were killed in a single day. Excluding 2001, 2021 saw the most intentional killings of police officers in the U.S. since 1995, when 74 officers were murdered.</p> <p>During an interview with CBS' 60 Minutes that aired on April 24, 2022, FBI Director Christopher Wray said, "violence against law enforcement in this country is one of the biggest phenomena that I think doesn't get enough attention." He went on to add that the deliberate targeting of police officers was on the rise and that "wearing the badge shouldn't make you a target." Of the 73 officers killed, 25 were killed in "unprovoked attacks," such as by ambush. In those cases where a political motive is suspected, the attacks spanned the ideological spectrum from far-left to far-right and raise the question of whether they should be classified as domestic terrorism.</p> <p>The rise in police killings is part of an increase in murders in the U.S. in recent years. In 2020, the numbers of murders overall rose by 29%, with nearly 5,000 more people killed than in the year prior. But it was not just murders that rose but rather all deaths by guns. That same year, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published in the New England Journal of Medicine, 45,222 Americans died by gunfire, be it homicide, suicide, accidental, or undetermined. This is a 13.5% increase from 2019. Of these total deaths, the number of homicide gun deaths in 2020 rose a staggering 33.4% from 2019, while suicides rose 1.1% in the same time period. Guns account for the majority of murders in the U.S, not just of police officers but of all victims. And for the first time, guns are the leading cause of death for children and adolescents (from 1-19 years old), overtaking motor vehicle crashes.</p> <p>While there have been many possible causes of the increase in murders, to include often vague mention of COVID-19 social impacts, the central role of guns—and the ease of access—in gun violence and gun deaths in the U.S. is too often inexplicably missing from the discussion. Only in the U.S. is it assumed that guns have little to do with gun violence and death, despite the reality that the number of guns in America has reached unprecedented levels. In 2021, Americans brought 19.9 million guns, the second-highest total ever, according to Small Arms Analytics and Forecasting. The highest total, 22.8 million, was the year prior, 2020. Both figures are on the rise at the same time as a substantial uptick in depression, anxiety, and mental health issues, as well as substance abuse, and spikes in domestic violence, especially during the pandemic.</p> <p>Fears of societal unrest due to COVID-19 and concerns about legislation that will restrict access to firearms have been mentioned as possible drivers of the record increases of gun sales in the U.S. Yet, adding more guns, in part because some Americans are worried about the pandemic leading to societal anarchy, creates a feedback loop. The net result is inevitably more guns leading to more gun violence, followed by more calls for more guns to counter the rise in gun crimes. Moreover, the increase in the</p>

	number of guns heightens the risks of accidents and misuse, most often associated with child-related incidents. There is no chance of new federal gun control or restrictions in the foreseeable future given political polarization, and in many of states, gun restrictions are being dismantled. States like Georgia and Texas have passed “constitutional carry” laws that abolish the requirement to obtain a permit and registration to carry a concealed firearm in public. What effect these laws have on the safety of police officers and all Americans will be seen in coming years and will likely lead this already worrying trend to continue in the foreseeable future.
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HEADLINE	05/02 Brazil cracks down on cocaine traffickers
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/brazil-cracks-down-on-cocaine-traffickers-as-they-target-transatlantic-routes/
GIST	<p>Brazilian Federal Police, together with port and customs and law enforcement partners, recently arrested six individuals and seized more than 30 kilos of cocaine as they say traffickers are using new tactics.</p> <p>Police dogs on the Port of Santos pier alerted the authorities to the cruise passenger’s luggage and officers searched the suitcases, they found hidden compartments containing cocaine. The passengers (five Brazilian and one Argentinian) were arrested on April 18 and prevented from boarding the cruise which sailed to Europe, stopping in Spain and Italy.</p> <p>The arrests were made as part of Brazilian Federal Police’s Operation Transatlantico, which focuses on drug trafficking via transatlantic passenger routes by sea and air. Earlier in April, Spanish police reported they had found 54 kilos of cocaine hidden in 15 pieces of luggage belonging to cruise passengers from Brazil. On this occasion, 10 passengers were arrested, all of whom were Brazilian citizens.</p> <p>Brazilian Federal Police have also reported numerous arrests and seizures at airports in April as part of the operation. These include a Paraguayan national attempting to smuggle cocaine to France via Foz do Iguaçu International Airport on April 17. As with the cruise passengers, the Paraguayan’s suitcase had been adapted to (unsuccessfully) conceal the cocaine.</p> <p>Several passengers have also been stopped at São Paulo International Airport. All were booked on international flights and were found to have drugs hidden inside clothing, cosmetic bottles, on person and in their luggage.</p> <p>On April 14, sniffer dogs alerted to a Brazilian passenger ticketed for a flight to Lisbon, Portugal. He had almost 12 kg of cocaine hidden inside pieces of fabric and his final destination was intended to be the city of Maputo, Mozambique.</p> <p>On April 15, almost 8kg of cocaine was seized from a passenger, a national of Guinea Bissau, who entered the country benefiting from the Refuge Law, hidden inside 16 dress shirts. The suspect was to board a flight to Doha, Qatar.</p> <p>Moments after this arrest, the same team of police arrested a Brazilian couple with almost 5kg of cocaine packed inside perfume, shampoo, deodorants, shaving creams and moisturizers. The suspects were destined for Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates.</p> <p>The following day, a Turkish national who was booked on a flight to the city of Arbil, in Iraq, was caught with a suitcase whose inner side was composed of a mixture of rubber and cocaine. The gross weight of the seized material amounted to more than 3kg.</p> <p>Two women, one from Angola and the other from Namibia, were arrested by police at the airport while trying to board a flight to Addis Ababa, with almost 18kg of cocaine hidden inside lycra shorts and vests, made with adhesive tape, which they wore under their clothes.</p>

In another action carried out that day, by the same team of police, a woman, a national of South Africa, was arrested with more than 2kg of cocaine hidden in the false bottom of her suitcase. She was destined for Johannesburg.

São Paulo International Airport was also the scene of an arrest in the early hours of April 26. Military police officers, who were patrolling the airport lobby, noticed that a passenger was very nervous to see them approaching. The woman, a national of Venezuela, had her luggage searched. Police found 79 packages containing cocaine. The passenger's travel destination was the city of Douala, Cameroon.

Elsewhere in Brazil this April, a Swiss national was arrested under Operation Transatlantico on April 20 at Belo Horizonte International Airport, with three kilos of cocaine. The drug was hidden in a false bottom in the passenger's suitcase. This followed an arrest just hours earlier of a Nigerian national who tried to smuggle 9kg of cocaine in blankets.

On April 23, Brazil's Federal Police carried out two arrests of passengers who tried to board flights at the same airport with cocaine. A Brazilian, who was traveling to Ghana, Africa, and a 54-year-old Nicaraguan, who was bound for Europe, were arrested. The national was found to have approximately 11kg of cocaine inserted inside plumb bobs. The Nicaraguan citizen hid 12kg of cocaine in the false bottoms of his suitcases.

Brazilian law enforcement also reports that 24kg of cocaine has been seized at Gilberto Freyre International Airport so far this year. Officials say they are noting an increase in size of shipments and new tactics such as the recent trend to attempt to blend in with cruise passengers or to use smaller destination ports and airports.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted new modalities of trafficking drugs, including new regions and routes, including through waterways and ports. In December, [a report](#) by Brazil's Centre of Excellence for Illicit Drug Supply Reduction said that due to pandemic travel restrictions, there was a diversification in the seaports used, with an increase in seizures of the drug in the ports of Salvador, Ilhéus and Joinville. This, combined with the growing trend of blending in with cruise passengers now that travel restrictions are lifting, necessitates a new focus on maritime trafficking routes.

With this in mind, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime – Brazil, co-organized the *First International Seminar on Narcotrafficking through Ports and Maritime Vessels* at the end of March to promote inter-agency cooperation through a broad discussion on strengthening prevention, control, inspection and repression of transnational crimes in the maritime environment.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Seattle violent shoplifting surge continues
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3445309/rantz-no-jail-for-suspect-seen-punching-victim-as-seattles-shoplifting-surge-continues/
GIST	<p>Seattle's violent shoplifting surge continues and judges keep offering little to no consequences for the thieves. Suspects continue to target downtown businesses despite an increased police presence. And the latest suspect won't likely see any jail time.</p> <p>Scot Witzel was charged by King County prosecutors for allegedly stealing from Nordstrom Rack in downtown Seattle. The suspect allegedly assaulted an employee who attempted to stop him from leaving with stolen shoes. It was recorded on surveillance footage acquired by the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH.</p> <p>But Witzel isn't likely to see jail time for the alleged assault or shoplifting. A judge placed him in a jail-alternative program.</p> <p>Assault caught on surveillance</p>

Prosecutors allege Witzel concealed over \$1,000 worth of products from Nordstrom Rack on April 2. They say he never attempted to pay for the items and even tried to “burn off security devices.” They also say he threw boots at one employee before assaulting another.

“When Mr. Witzel was stopped by loss prevention officers, Mr. Witzel transferred the bag of stolen merchandise from one hand to the other and used his free hand to punch a loss prevention officer in the face,” the King County Prosecutor’s Office said.

The assault was captured on surveillance footage from multiple angles.

Witzel was arrested at the scene. The prosecutor says the suspect made “multiple threats to kill officers during his transport to jail.” Couple the violent threats with the actual violence at the store, prosecutors argued in court documents that he “demonstrates an escalation in violence and a willingness to resort to attacking others when he is confronted or angry.”

The suspect’s history includes two warrants since 2021, and “was on bench warrant status from December 15, 2021, until he was arrested in this case.”

“Mr. Witzel committed this crime after he was ordered to have no contact with any Nordstrom stores in Washington state or commit any new law violations pursuant to conditions of release in [previous case].” the prosecutor wrote. “Further, when Mr. Witzel was told that he was being trespassed from Nordstrom, he responded by saying he would just change his appearance, indicating he has no plans to abide by the trespass order.”

The prosecutor asked for bail. The judge had different plans.

No jail for suspect

Rather than set bail and send him to jail, King County Superior Court Judge Johanna Bender released Witzel on his own personal recognizance. But there were some conditions.

On April 20, Witzel was ordered to attend the Community Center for Alternative Programs Enhanced (CCAP) as a condition of his release. This program is offered instead of jail time, and it’s had [decidedly mixed results](#). While low-level misdemeanor offenses seem tailor-made for these programs, Witzel is not a good fit based on what prosecutors presented.

This wasn’t merely an alleged shoplifting incident. He is seen on camera assaulting a staff member. After the arrest, he allegedly threatened to murder police and indicated he would return to the store. Why is *this* the suspect worthy of CCAP with little accountability? We’ve seen too many low-level misdemeanor suspects not committing to jail-alternative programs only to re-offend. And the situation isn’t getting better yet.

The court, through a spokesperson, offered the following statement:

“The decision of whether to release or detain a defendant in a criminal case is one of the most important decisions a judge can make. King County Superior Court takes these decisions seriously.

“Judges explain their decisions on the record during court proceedings. Judges are not allowed to speak about a case to the public or the parties involved, including the victims of an alleged crime, outside of court proceedings, directly or through the media. Intended to ensure fairness, these and other restrictions on what a judge can say and do form a group of laws called the [Code of Judicial Conduct](#).

“While Judge Bender cannot provide a statement on this case before her, I can on behalf of the Court provide general information on release decisions. In the United States, every person accused of a crime is presumed innocent. [Washington State Court Rule 3.2](#) presumes these individuals will be released by the judge, unless it is found that they are unlikely to return to court on their own when required, or it is shown

	there is a likely danger that they will commit a violent crime, intimidate witnesses, or otherwise unlawfully interfere with the administration of justice.”
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HEADLINE	05/02 Ex-NYPD cop guilty assault; Jan 6 riot case
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/02/us/former-nypd-officer-convicted-jan-6.html
GIST	<p>A former New York City police officer who claimed he was acting in self-defense when he swung a metal flagpole at a fellow officer during the attack on the Capitol last January was convicted on Monday of all charges, including assault.</p> <p>The former officer, Thomas Webster, was the first person charged in connection with the riot to defend himself at trial by claiming that the officers protecting the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, had used excessive force against the pro-Trump mob that stormed the building. The guilty verdict in the case — returned within two hours on the first full day of deliberations — could give pause to other defendants planning to use similar arguments at their own trials.</p> <p>Mr. Webster, a former Marine who once served on the protective detail of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York, testified that he had gone to Washington to hear President Donald J. Trump speak near the White House and became upset as he walked toward the Capitol and saw people injured by the violence that had erupted.</p> <p>As he approached the barricades that surrounded the building, he told the jury, a Metropolitan Police Department officer, Noah Rathbun, provoked him with a brief wave then threw a punch at him that struck him like a “freight train.”</p> <p>But videos played by the prosecution cast doubt on this account, showing Mr. Webster emerging from the crowd and berating officers at the barricades in a state of foul-mouthed rage. Mr. Webster could be seen in the videos repeatedly pushing at the barricades, then swinging a flagpole at Officer Rathbun before he shoved through the police line and tackled the officer.</p> <p>Mr. Webster’s weeklong trial in Federal District Court in Washington touched on one of the striking elements of Jan. 6: that even though many people in the crowd that day vocally supported the police, scores were ultimately charged with assaulting officers and more than 140 were injured.</p> <p>During his time on the witness stand last week, Mr. Webster described the dizzying experience of attacking a fellow member of law enforcement.</p> <p>“It was almost like a role reversal,” he told the jury at one point. “I felt like I was the cop and he was the protester.”</p> <p>The jury also found Mr. Webster guilty of interfering with law enforcement during a civil disorder, and entering and remaining in a restricted area with a deadly or dangerous weapon. Moments after the verdict was handed down, another former Marine, Kevin Creek, who pleaded guilty in December to assaulting a different officer during the riot, was sentenced in a nearby courtroom to 27 months in prison.</p> <p>With its victory in the Webster trial, the Justice Department has now won all four of its jury trials connected to the Capitol attack.</p> <p>In March, a jury in federal court in Washington convicted Guy Wesley Reffitt, a member of a Texas militia, of leading a section of the mob in an advance on the police outside the Capitol and disrupting Congress’s certification of the 2020 presidential election.</p> <p>Last month, a jury found Dustin Thompson, an Ohio exterminator, guilty of obstructing Congress and stealing government property despite his claims that he had been acting on Mr. Trump’s orders.</p>

	<p>A few days before that, a former Virginia police officer, Thomas Robertson, was convicted by a jury on six counts, including the obstruction of the official electoral count by Congress.</p> <p>One defendant, Matthew Martin, a former defense contractor from New Mexico, was acquitted at a bench trial in early April after the judge agreed with his claims that the police had let him into the Capitol.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 New Pierce Co. mental health court
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/new-mental-health-court-aims-to-break-the-cycle-of-crime-in-pierce-county
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - Today's the first day of a new program in Pierce County meant to break the cycle of repeat offenders who may be repeating crimes because they suffer from a mental illness.</p> <p>"Yeah, there was a very obvious need for it. We're not addressing the underlining issue that causes their criminal behavior," said Judge Kevin A. McCann, in Pierce County District Court.</p> <p>Judge McCann tells me they started developing this new Mental Health Court for Pierce County about 18 months ago. It's for people charged with misdemeanors or gross misdemeanors in District Court.</p> <p>Defendants with a mental health diagnosis, that's believed to be pushing them into a life a of crime, can qualify for this new program, giving them housing in addition to mental health treatment. That diagnosis must also be treatable, so Judge McCann says they're looking for mood disorders, like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or a depression-type diagnosis.</p> <p>"Our requirements are, they have to take the medication. They have to sign a contract that says I will take medication," said Judge McCann.</p> <p>He said they also monitor the medical treatment through the program and build stability and confidence on both sides, so they can continue down their path and don't just leave the court and fall back into the same behavior.</p> <p>There's also a list of things that will make someone ineligible for the new Mental Health Court.</p> <p>You cannot be accused in any crime involving rape, robbery, murder, firearms, or have any previous offenses with firearms.</p> <p>The program utilizes a full team, to provide intense accountability and encouragement from a judge, therapeutic court coordinator, case manager, prosecutor, defense attorney, probation officer and other law enforcement professionals.</p> <p>This new Mental Health Court created a program that keeps them committed for a minimum of 10 months and up to 2 years.</p> <p>"They've learned enough about themselves they've learned enough about the resources and we pair them up with everything that's going to make them successful," said Judge McCann.</p> <p>So, how can they fund this program? Judge McCann says they got lucky that resources lined up for this. Support came in from the community, the county council and state legislators.</p> <p>"It's a win for everybody," he said.</p> <p>The program right now is set up to take on 20 defendants in this first year and already, there are 3 referrals on day one. Two of those referrals are coming from the county's Felony Mental Health Court, which started in 2015. It set out to serve 40 people with chronic mental illness that first year.</p> <p>It worked so well, the county expanded it in 2018, to serve 80 people. In that program, participants must participate a minimum of 18 months to graduate from it. Referrals can go to the newly created Mental</p>

	<p>Health Court, if prosecutors and the judge, agree to knock down a person's felony charge to a misdemeanor. Judge McCann explained that in some cases, that's the better option, to get the defendant into a program that's shorter, at just 10 months.</p> <p>This new program makes sure the defendant has housing through the program and that they have stable housing when they graduate from it. Not only do they make sure housing is there, but they also provide transportation throughout the program, so there are no excuses for missing any of it.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Federal charges Friday Harbor arsonist
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/federal-charges-expected-friday-harbor-arson-suspect-after-charges-dropped/GVHYBQ5LWVBBTEDOERFFBVRVNI/
GIST	<p>The 33-year-old suspect in the April 7 fire that caused millions of dollars in damage to Friday Harbor businesses has been federally charged on Monday, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.</p> <p>Dwight Henline, of Whidbey Island, was arrested by Island County deputies on April 16.</p> <p>According to court documents, investigators determined the fire started on the back deck of the Crystal Seas Kayaking building at 40 Spring Street around 10:04 p.m. on April 6.</p> <p>As the fire smoldered, it intensified and began to grow at about 3:15 a.m. on April 7.</p> <p>The fire was reported by a citizen at 3:43 a.m.</p> <p>Multiple agencies battled the four-alarm fire for hours, where it seriously damaged or destroyed the Crystal Seas Kayaking building, the Windermere Real Estate office, and the building housing Crow's Nest Coffee and Herb's Tavern before it was finally put out.</p> <p>Videos collected by investigators showed Henline near the origin of the fire on April 6.</p> <p>Investigators were able to track Henline before and after the fire, including Henline purchasing candy, energy drinks, bleach and ammonia at King's Market with a debit or credit card in the early evening.</p> <p>At about 9:53 p.m., Henline used cash to buy lighter fuel at a convenience store.</p> <p>The near empty bottle was later found in Henline's Whidbey Island home.</p> <p>After buying the lighter fluid, Henline walked some Friday Harbor alleys, in the direction of Crystal Seas Kayaking.</p> <p>One minute after the fire began, Henline walked away from the area toward the harbor where he picked up a suitcase he had stashed in the lower deck area beneath the Friday Harbor Ice Cream Company.</p> <p>Henline then boarded the Anacortes ferry.</p> <p>Henline faces between five and 20 years in prison.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Arrest warrant; missing Alabama jail official
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/search-ongoing-for-murder-suspect-officer-who-left-jail/
GIST	<p>FLORENCE, Ala. (AP) — Authorities on Monday continued the hunt for an “extremely dangerous” murder suspect and issued an arrest warrant for the Alabama jail official they now believe helped him escape.</p>

Inmate Casey Cole White, 38, was shackled and handcuffed when he and Vicky White, the facility's assistant director of corrections, left the Lauderdale County Detention Center in Florence, Alabama, on Friday morning. They have not been seen since, although the patrol vehicle that the pair used when leaving the detention center was found at a nearby shopping center parking lot after their absence was discovered.

Authorities have no idea where they are, although the inmate should be recognizable by his size. He stands 6 feet, 9 inches (2.06 meters) tall and weighs about 260 pounds (118 kilograms). Authorities warned that anyone seeing the pair should not approach them.

"We consider both of them dangerous and, in all probability, both individuals are armed," U.S. Marshal Marty Keely said at a press conference Monday. He noted that Casey White "will stand out" because of his size, even if he has changed his appearance.

Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said Monday that they had issued an arrest warrant for Vicky White, 56, on charges of permitting or allowing an escape. She is not related to Casey White, who was serving a 75-year prison sentence and awaiting trial on a capital murder charge.

Vicky White told co-workers she was taking him to the courthouse for a mental health evaluation. But Singleton later said no such evaluation was scheduled. She also violated a policy that required more than one official to be involved in transporting inmates, a rule that officials emphasized for White because he had previously tried to escape, Singleton said. The sheriff said video showed the pair left the jail and went straight to that parking lot.

"We know she participated, whether she did that willingly or if she was coerced, threatened somehow to participate, not really sure. We know for sure she did participate," Singleton said.

"Casey White, as you've heard me say over and over and over is an extremely dangerous person and we need to get him located and get him off the street," Singleton said.

Casey White was serving time for a string of crimes that included attempted murder, robbery and burglary. While in prison, he had confessed to the 2015 stabbing death of a 58-year-old woman, authorities said, which caused him to be brought to the Lauderdale County jail for court proceedings. The sheriff said they believe White plotted an earlier escape from the jail in 2020 when they found a makeshift knife.

He could face the death penalty if convicted of the capital murder charge. The U.S. Marshals Service is offering up to \$10,000 for information.

Singleton said Vicky White had been an exemplary employee and jail employees are "just devastated." "This is not the Vicky White we know, by any stretch of the imagination," the sheriff said.

Vicky White had planned to retire and Friday was to be her last day. He said she had sold her home about a month ago and "talked about going to the beach."

The sheriff said they had no leads at this point on where the two are located.

"If we knew where they were at, we would be there and not here," Singleton said.

As an assistant director for corrections, Vicky White moved throughout the county detention facility and had multiple opportunities every day to be in contact with any given inmate, the sheriff said. Her job duties also included coordinating transport of inmates.

Vicky White's mother, Pat Davis, told WAAY she was in shock and scared for her daughter.

	<p>“As a mother, I didn’t know how to act because I thought at first it was a mistake. And then when I found out for sure it was, it was just disbelief,” says Pat Davis. She told the station that “we just want her back” and found it difficult to believe her daughter would help an inmate escape.</p> <p>“She’s never done anything, I bet she’s never even had a speeding ticket,” Pat Davis said.</p> <p>Lauderdale County District Attorney Chris Connolly said he was also shocked. He last spoke to Vicky White on Thursday about transporting an inmate with a broken ankle to get medical care, and nothing seemed unusual.</p> <p>“She is somebody I would have trusted with most anything. She was one of those people you could call if you needed something to happen at that jail. She was the go-to person,” Connolly said.</p> <p>The U.S. Marshals Service said anyone with information about Casey White’s location or Vicky White’s disappearance can call the service at 1-800-336-0102. Anonymous tips may also be submitted through the U.S. Marshals Tip App.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Major TB outbreak at Aberdeen prison
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/major-tuberculosis-outbreak-at-stafford-creek-prison-spurs-worries-among-incarcerated/
GIST	<p>A tuberculosis outbreak at Stafford Creek Corrections Center has spurred fears among incarcerated people and their families over whether correctional officials are properly responding to the serious and sometimes fatal infectious disease.</p> <p>The cluster of 17 cases of active TB disease at the prison have helped drive what state health officials described last week as Washington’s largest TB outbreak in two decades. The state has recorded 70 cases so far this year.</p> <p>Some of those incarcerated at Stafford Creek have raised alarms at the Aberdeen prison — recently hammered by state investigators for flouting pandemic safety measures — questioning whether the state Department of Corrections is capable of handling the outbreak.</p> <p>“I have a grave concern, not just for myself but for everybody,” said Theodore Rhone, 64, who lives in a minimum security unit at the prison and described his risk factors as including diabetes, high blood pressure and getting previously stabbed in the heart.</p> <p>Speaking by phone Monday, Rhone said his worries are based in part on what he has seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, which infected many at the prison, killing five incarcerated people and three employees — the highest toll at any of Washington’s dozen prisons. “They haven’t handled anything,” he said.</p> <p>In December, state regulators fined the DOC \$60,000 for failing to enforce pandemic protective measures at Stafford Creek. An investigation by the state Department of Labor and Industries cited the agency for a “willful serious violation,” finding failures to enforce distancing measures and ensure that staff members were wearing masks.</p> <p>Another man among the 1,800 incarcerated at Stafford Creek said he has tested positive for a latent TB infection. “I got it here. I am furious about it,” said the man, who requested anonymity out of concern over possible retaliation. “There could be potentially people leaving this facility and entering their communities and possibly spreading a virus that is laying dormant.”</p> <p>Persons with latent TB have no symptoms and cannot spread it to others. Without treatment, about 5% to 10% of people with such infections will develop active TB disease, which is infectious, within two years,</p>

according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). An estimated 200,000 people in Washington have inactive TB.

The 17 cases disclosed at Stafford Creek are active TB disease cases, according to the state Board of Health. Those people are in stable condition and are receiving medication “per clinical guidelines,” DOC spokesperson Toby Hatley said in an email.

The DOC has been testing staff and incarcerated people at the prison, Dr. MaryAnn Curl, the agency’s chief medical officer said in a statement last week, providing no further details.

DOC declined to make medical staff or media spokespeople available for phone interviews regarding the outbreak. The agency has not stated how many people associated with the prison have tested positive for latent TB.

The number of active TB cases has grown over the past month and a half. As of March 14, the prison had reported 11 active cases, according to [a memo](#) sent to staff and incarcerated people and their families by Ron Haynes, the superintendent of Stafford Creek.

Tuberculosis is caused by a bacterium that usually attacks the lungs, causing symptoms including coughing, fever, night sweats, chest pain and weight loss. The disease has become increasingly rare in the U.S., but killed 1.5 million globally in 2020, according to the World Health Organization. In Washington, seven TB patients died between 2017 and 2021, according to a state health department spokesperson.

The general public is not at risk for TB, said Monica Pecha, senior epidemiologist and tuberculosis program manager for the state Department of Health. Infections are typically caused by repeated exposure to someone with active symptoms.

“Going to the grocery store for instance would not be considered an exposure or a risk factor,” Pecha said in an interview.

But people who live or work in congregate settings, such as homeless shelters, long-term care facilities, hospitals and prisons, are at greater danger due to shared air spaces, according to the CDC.

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HEADLINE	05/02 Tacoma police arrest ‘known serial arsonist’
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260988177.html
GIST	<p>Tacoma police on Sunday arrested a 34-year-old man suspected to have set three dumpsters fires downtown. Police said one fire was directly against an apartment building and the others were near a construction site.</p> <p>The man was booked into Pierce County Jail on Sunday for investigation of first-degree arson and second-degree arson.</p> <p>Officers from Tacoma Police Department responded about 6:32 p.m. to the 200 block of South G Street for reports of a dumpster fully engulfed in flames against an apartment building, according to a news release from the department. Police said officers talked to witnesses, who provided a description of a man they saw lighting the fire.</p> <p>Shortly thereafter, South Sound 911 dispatchers received reports of two more dumpster fires near the 400 block of St. Helens Avenue.</p> <p>Officers responded and tried unsuccessfully to put out the fires with a fire extinguisher. According to the release, Tacoma Fire Department responded and put out the flames. Witnesses again provided a description of a person seen at the fire, and police said it matched the description of the man seen lighting the fire on South G Street.</p>

	<p>Officers located the arson suspect at about 6:49 p.m. Police said he was detained without incident.</p> <p>Police described the man as a “known serial arsonist who has multiple prior arrests for arson in downtown Tacoma.” According to court records, the man has a prior conviction from 2021 in Pierce County Superior Court for second-degree reckless burning after he was accused of setting a dumpster on fire downtown and lighting a fire under a railroad trestle.</p> <p>The suspect was also convicted in January of second-degree malicious mischief for breaking car windows near downtown.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Canada: US drone w/guns intercepted
SOURCE	https://nationalpost.com/news/local-news/u-s-drone-carrying-guns-intercepted-after-flying-into-southwestern-ontario/wcm/3e9e4452-d0b7-4fec-b078-0d6e1840be94
GIST	<p>Provincial police are investigating after officers say they found a drone carrying a bag filled with several handguns in Lambton County – a device they believe was flown into Canada from the U.S.</p> <p>Lambton OPP were notified of a large drone stuck in a tree along the St. Clair River near Port Lambton about 8:30 a.m. last Friday, police say.</p> <p>A bag containing 11 handguns was attached to the drone, which investigators believe were coming from the U.S., police said.</p> <p>Police seized the handguns and are investigating.</p> <p>Anyone with information about the incident is asked to contact OPP at 1-888-310-1122 or Crime Stoppers 1-800-222-8477.</p> <p>A “drone” refers to unpiloted aircraft. They’re increasingly common among tech enthusiasts and hobbyists such as photographers and can be easily purchased.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/02 Fired police officer charged in boy’s murder
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/fired-philadelphia-police-officer-charged-murder-12-year/story?id=84442589
GIST	<p>A former Philadelphia police officer was charged with murder Monday in the death of a 12-year-old boy who a prosecutor alleged was shot in the back after apparently complying with orders to toss down a gun and get on the ground.</p> <p>Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner said during a news conference that former undercover cop Edsaul Mendoza was indicted by a grand jury on charges of first-degree murder, third-degree murder, voluntary manslaughter and possession of an instrument of a crime.</p> <p>The charges stem from the fatal shooting of Thomas "T.J." Siderio Jr. in South Philadelphia on March 1.</p> <p>Siderio was shot after the 26-year-old Mendoza and three other undercover officers in an unmarked car attempted to stop him and a 17-year-old boy who were riding their bicycles in the wrong direction on a street, authorities said. Krasner said Siderio was initially armed with a handgun and likely fired a shot through a rear window of the unmarked police car, setting off the fatal foot chase.</p> <p>Krasner said video of the shooting that was played for the grand jury appeared to show Mendoza ordering Siderio to put down the gun and get on the ground just seconds before he was shot.</p> <p>The district attorney described the foot chase by Mendoza as being "tactically unsound" and that the former officer fired three times at Siderio, two of which missed.</p>

At the time of the last two shots fired by Mendoza, Siderio was unarmed, having discarded a 9mm gun 40 feet from where he was shot, Krasner said.

"It is certain that Thomas Siderio, at the time he was shot, had stopped running and was possibly surrendering," Krasner said. "It is certain that Thomas Siderio, at the time he was shot, was essentially face down on the sidewalk, that he was in a position that approximates sort of a push-up ... perhaps turning to look at the officer who was pursuing him when he was shot through the back."

The prosecutor alleged that Mendoza knew Siderio was unarmed and not a threat when he shot the boy.

Krasner said Mendoza was standing close to Siderio when he shot the boy.

He said that prior to firing the fatal shot, Mendoza allegedly approached Siderio in a manner that was "completely inconsistent with Mendoza believing that Siderio was armed."

"He (Mendoza) was within half a car length of Thomas Siderio and thus would have had the opportunity to see Thomas Siderio clearly at the time he fired," Krasner said.

Krasner said immediately after shooting Siderio, Mendoza told another officer where Siderio "threw the gun," and even pointed to the location of the weapon, found on the street at the edge of the sidewalk.

"Thus, when officer Mendoza fired the third and fatal shot, he knew the 12-year-old, 5-foot tall, 111-pound Thomas Siderio no longer had a gun and no ability to harm him, but he fired a shot through his back nonetheless that killed him," Krasner said.

Krasner also said it remains unclear if Siderio realized that Mendoza and the other officers who pulled up to him and his friend in an unmarked car were police officers. He said the officers were all wearing street clothes and vests with no marking on the front indicating they were police.

"This is the kind of encounter that could cause someone on the street to believe that the people who are pulling up are not police at all, to believe that the people who are pulling up in a climate that is obviously rife with gun violence are pulling up to do them harm and are not law enforcement at all," Krasner said. "It is very concerning."

An attorney for Siderio's mother, Desirae Frame, called the child's death an "execution."

"It is devastating to learn that this was not only an unjustified shooting, this was murder," the mother's attorney, Andrew Duffy, said during a news conference after the district attorney's announcement. "It's so painful to learn today that he was lying down, face into the sidewalk, trying to look back and he was shot in cold blood and executed."

Duffy said Frame and Siderio's father, Thomas Siderio Sr., plan to file notice soon that they intend to sue the city over the boy's death.

"It was absolutely devastating for Desirae Frame ... to learn that her son should still be alive today had the police done their job properly and not criminally," Duffy said.

A bail hearing for Mendoza was held Monday morning, and a judge ordered him to be jailed without bail.

It was not immediately clear if Mendoza has hired an attorney.

A spokesperson for the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 5 told ABC station WPVI-TV in Philadelphia that the police union plans to provide an attorney for Mendoza and hopes he will receive a fair trial.

	<p>About a week after the shooting, Philadelphia Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw announced she was suspending Mendoza, a five-year veteran of the police force, for 30 days, after which she intended to dismiss him for violating the department's "use-of-force directive." Mendoza has since been fired.</p> <p>"It's tragic that we have trigger-pullers as young as 12," Outlaw said at the time. "And it's tragic that we had one of our own, again, go against everything who we say we are. There are no winners here."</p>
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